

**Public Women, Private Vice:  
Resisting and Reforming the State Regulation of Sex Work in 1940s Algiers**

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### **A Note on Translation**

With the exception of the Constitution of the Fourth Republic, all French primary sources have been translated by the author and reviewed by this paper's second reader. Original quotations can be found in the footnotes. Secondary materials with French titles, where quoted, have also been translated by the author.

## Glossary

**centre de salubrité.** “Sobriety center,” translated in this paper as “hygiene center.” A designated facility for mandatory STI screening.

**contrôle sanitaire.** “Sanitary controls.” The set of regulations and practices for surveilling the vaginal health of sex workers, including genital inspections mandated by law.

**fille soumise.** Literally, “subjected” or “submissive girl.” A sex worker registered with the police. A *fille soumise* could work *en maison* or *isolée*.

**isolée.** Meaning “isolated.” Used to refer to registered sex workers who did not work out of *maisons de tolérance*, soliciting clients and bringing them, for example, to *maisons de passe*.

**maison de tolérance.** Literally, “house of tolerance.” A state-licensed brothel.

**maison de passe / maison de rendez-vous.** Hotels rented by the hour.

**police des mœurs.** Literally, the “morals police.” The branch of the police service tasked with controlling, among other issues of “public morality,” sex work.

## Introduction

In May 1944, a circular landed on the desk of the prefect of Algiers province from the governor-general of Algeria's Directorate of National Security regarding the medical surveillance of registered sex workers in the small town of Médéa.<sup>1</sup> This was wartime: 65,000 British and American troops had invaded North Africa in the Fall of 1942, and it would be another year before Nazi Germany surrendered to the Allies. Yet the memo, marked "confidential" in the colonial archives, concerned an issue of a most intimate nature: an outbreak of sexually transmitted infections among British aviators "following sexual relations with the personnel of a licensed Médéa brothel."<sup>2</sup> The provost-marshal of the Royal Air Force had reported the incident to the national police, and the British authorities had contacted the doctor responsible for overseeing the medical surveillance of the region's licensed brothels.<sup>3</sup> Dr. Max Party had assured them that all licensed sex workers had been examined twice weekly for sexually transmitted infections, with negative results.<sup>4</sup> The situation changed when a British aviator formally accused one individual of causing the outbreak. She was the sole woman, he claimed, with whom he had had relations since his arrival in North Africa: a pensioner in *la maison de tolérance n° 5* named Suzanne.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Le Général d'Armée, Gouverneur Général de l'Algérie, à Monsieur Le Préfet Du Département d'Alger, "a/s contrôle médical des filles soumises à Médéa," May 5, 1944, 91 1K 500, Préfecture d'Alger, Cabinet, Série K, Sous-série 1K, Boîte 500, Dossier: "Prostitution de juillet 1945 à mai 1955," Archives nationales d'outre-mer (ANOM), Aix-en-Provence, France.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 1. ... à la suite des relations sexuelles avec le personnel de la maison de tolérance de Médéa.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 2.

Suzanne's identification inflamed British officers whose rage, in turn, panicked the French government bureaucrats they deemed responsible. "The British authorities appear to doubt the efficiency of the medical visits conducted by Dr. Party," the prefect warned, "and report him at once as a pro-German collaborator."<sup>6</sup> The prefect urged the governor-general to launch a "thorough investigation" into the facts of the situation and to relay all attainable information on Party's "political attitude."<sup>7</sup> The said inquest, conducted by Inspectors Linouzi and Haddifi of the Médéa General Information Police and completed by early June, absolved Dr. Party but left open the question of whether the sanitary surveillance regime functioned well.<sup>8</sup> The departmental inspector of hygiene, Dr. Lartigue, thus went to Médéa himself on May 31, 1944, and within two weeks addressed the prefect confirming that the system was working as it should: Screenings took place in a designated facility close to the red-light district, with one part reserved for sanitary inspections and another to hospitalize contagious sex workers.<sup>9</sup> On Wednesdays and Saturdays, Dr. Party and a laboratory nurse screened the women, and, once weekly, the doctor took vaginal and cervical mucus samples and examined them under a microscope.<sup>10</sup> He detained all those suspected of infection for treatment at the facility, which was fully stocked with the necessary equipment and medications.<sup>11</sup> When Dr. Lartigue inspected the premises, eight out of sixty sex workers were detained.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Le Général d'Armée, Gouverneur Général de l'Algérie, à Monsieur Le Préfet Du Département d'Alger, 2, 91 1K 500, ANOM.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. ... *faits une enquête approfondie* ...

<sup>8</sup> Les Inspecteurs Linouzi et Haddifi de la Police des Renseignements Généraux de Médéa à Monsieur Le Commissaire Principal Chef de La P.R.G. Du District d'Alger, "A/S du Docteur Party," June 7, 1944, 91 1K 500, ANOM.

<sup>9</sup> Le Docteur Lartigue, Inspecteur Départemental d'Hygiène, à Monsieur Le Préfet, "Contrôle médical des filles soumises à Médéa," June 10, 1944, 91 1K 500, ANOM.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 1; Ibid., 2.

As for Suzanne, the remaining fragments of her story only reach us from the pen of Dr. Lartigue. Upon his arrival at Médéa, Drs. Lartigue and Party went to the *maison de tolérance n° 5*, called on Suzanne, and brought her to the hygiene center, “in the state in which she found herself, that is to say that she could not employ any camouflage or makeup” to conceal a sexually transmitted infection.<sup>13</sup> Dr. Lartigue then examined her himself: “She had no external venereal lesions or suspicious discharge,” he reported in his note to the prefect. “I took phlegm from the cervix, which I sent to the departmental hygiene laboratory for examination. This was negative.”<sup>14</sup> Having concluded that Suzanne was neither presently ill nor contagious, Dr. Lartigue consulted her medical file and confirmed that her sole “accident” had been a case of metritis, contracted on February 6, 1942.<sup>15</sup>

Dr. Lartigue followed his evaluation of Suzanne’s vaginal health with a series of interviews. First, he applied to the commissioner of police about the status of sex work in Médéa. Commissioner Monjo reported that some Algerian women occasionally sold sexual services in the city without official government cards and thus were not subject to sanitary surveillance. He was, however, certain that the British soldiers did not fraternize with these women because they could not have done so unperceived. Although no Allied troops were stationed in Médéa, “on Saturdays and Sundays,” Monjo said, “Allied soldiers came in bands to Médéa and entered the brothels to have fun, accompanied by strong

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<sup>13</sup> Le Docteur Lartigue, Inspecteur Départemental d’Hygiène, à Monsieur Le Préfet, 1, 91 1K 500, ANOM. *Dès mon arrivée à MEDEA, je me suis rendu en compagnie du Dr. PARTY à la maison de tolérance n° 5. Ayant réclamé la fille Suzanne je l’ai amenée à la maison de salubrité dans l’état où elle se trouvait, c’est-à-dire qu’elle n’a pu se livrer à aucun camouflage ou maquillage.*

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 2. *Je l’ai examinée et j’ai pu constater qu’elle ne portait aucune lésion vénérienne externe, ni aucun écoulement suspect. J’ai prélevé des mucosités au niveau du col de l’utérus que j’ai remis au laboratoire départemental d’Hygiène aux fins d’examen. Celui-ci a été négatif...*

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.



libations.”<sup>16</sup> Thus, the soldiers could just as likely have been infected in the places where they stayed during the week because it was impossible to confirm that the contagion began at the brothel in which Suzanne worked. Moreover, Doctor-Colonel Lambert, chief medical officer of Médéa, reasoned, “if Allied soldiers are easily contaminated in Médéa’s licensed brothels, one should be able to observe the same effects among French soldiers.”<sup>17</sup> But Lambert indicated that STIs were rare among French troops in Médéa, and moreover that none of them had ever identified Suzanne as a source of infection.

Dr. Lartigue’s report to the prefect concluded with recommendations for how Royal Air Force officials might better protect their men from sexually transmitted infections. It might “appease the worries of the British authorities” to know, he wrote, that a prophylactic cabin operated in the red-light district four days a week.<sup>18</sup> Dr. Lartigue suggested the Allied soldiers visit these cabins when the troops were permitted access to the area. Doctor-Colonel Lambert even offered to open the prophylactic cabin on Sundays, when Allied soldiers generally came to Médéa “on the condition that security be provided by the military police” to avoid conflict with the French guard.<sup>19</sup> Dr. Lartigue seconded this recommendation and signed his name.

What happened next—to Suzanne, the R.A.F soldiers, and Dr. Party—left no trace in the historical archive. Nonetheless, these fragmentary exchanges introduce this essay’s key protagonists:

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<sup>16</sup> Le Docteur Lartigue, Inspecteur Départemental d’Hygiène, à Monsieur Le Préfet, 2, 91 1K 500, ANOM. *Il arrivait très souvent par contre, surtout le Samedi et le Dimanche, que des militaires alliés venaient en bande à MEDEA et se rendaient dans les maisons de tolérance en menant une vie joyeuse, accompagnée de forces libations.*

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 3. *Si des militaires alliés se contaminent facilement dans les maisons de tolérance de MEDEA, on doit observer les mêmes effets chez les militaires français.*

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. ... *pourrait apaiser les inquiétudes des autorités britanniques.*

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. *Il subordonne son acceptation d’ouvrir la cabine prophylactique aux alliés à la condition qu’un service d’ordre soit effectuée par la Military Police.*

the individuals responsible for implementing sexual regulations in colonial Algiers, including civil bureaucrats, colonial doctors, and municipal police; their subjects, including European women working in licensed brothels and Algerian women eluding the official gaze; and the Allied soldiers and military authorities who put pressure on the regime. The letters show how military and colonial officials alike viewed sex work as the source of sexually transmitted infections and hence as a menace to public health. The procedure for handling the accusation, including Suzanne's mandated and publicized vaginal inspection, demonstrates the bureaucratic apparatus that subjected women identified as sex workers to coercive hygienic controls. The police commissioner's mention of "native occasional prostitutes" without cards and thus beyond sanitary surveillance alludes to national distinctions within the colonial system of regulations between indigenous people and settler citizens.<sup>20</sup> Wartime tensions transform Suzanne's name into a dual figure for French conspiracy and British lack of discipline. Finally, the process by which French authorities surveilled, detained, and examined Suzanne and exposed her most intimate medical records in negotiations with Allied occupiers demonstrates how the colonial licensing regime made women's bodies a public good.

Suzanne lived in the 1940s, during a period of legal transformation for France and its colonies. The empire was adapting to increased anti-colonial pressure with reforms, from the French Committee of National Liberation's extension of citizenship to a limited number of Muslim Algerians in 1944 to the abolition of forced labor and the discriminatory regime of the *indigénat* under the 1946

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<sup>20</sup> Le Docteur Lartigue, Inspecteur Départemental d'Hygiène, à Monsieur Le Préfet, 2, 91 1K 500, ANOM.

Constitution of the Fourth Republic's restructuring of empire as the French Union.<sup>21</sup> At the same time, in France, de Gaulle newly acknowledged French women as political agents when he granted them the vote in 1944.<sup>22</sup> In 1946, the government abolished the regulation of sex work in metropolitan France, partially in response to the pressures placed on the system by the successive occupations of German and American troops.<sup>23</sup> The chaos brought by the Allied landing in North Africa, however, yielded no equivalent result.<sup>24</sup> After the war, the regulations that had come under fire in the metropole remained conspicuously in force in the "overseas territories." Faced with the changing political status of women and colonized people, colonial bureaucrats, doctors, and police in Algeria proposed sanitary reforms to reframe colonial power's arbitrary exercise in a more palatable way.

Focusing on the commercial sex market in the city of Algiers, this essay argues that the postwar emphasis on voluntary participation in sanitary controls deployed women's medical consent as a strategy to reformulate and extend a colonial system of sanitary control underwritten by the threat of police violence. The doctors and bureaucrats responsible for this shift did so to preserve a regime newly under political threat from the chaos and disorganization of the Allied occupation, women's recently won political rights, and the new vocabulary of empire under the French Union. In this context, the system's abolition in metropolitan France demanded a new set of explanations for its preservation in Algeria. Administrators needed, moreover, to address a sustained pattern of women's

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<sup>21</sup> Abderrahmane Bouchène et al., "Chronologie. 1919-1944," in *Histoire de l'Algérie à la période coloniale*, Poche / Essais (Paris: La Découverte, 2014), 347–51, <https://doi.org/10.3917/dec.bouch.2013.01.0347>.

<sup>22</sup> Steven C. Hause, *Women's Suffrage and Social Politics in the French Third Republic* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984), 251, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb02499.0001.001>.

<sup>23</sup> Alain Corbin, *Les Filles de Noce: Misère Sexuelle et Prostitution: 19e et 20e Siècles*, Collection Historique (Paris: Aubier Montaigne, 1978), 505–6.

<sup>24</sup> Corbin, 506.

resistance to registration and, in particular, the police. The system that emerged out of the crucible of the 1940s acknowledged this resistance only in so far as it served colonial bureaucrats' strategic influence in bringing more women than ever under the medical gaze. To this extent, new public health rhetoric in colonial Algiers mirrored broader reforms to French imperialism implemented under the Fourth Republic, which gave the empire new life by repelling its most violent practices without undermining the asymmetry of power on which it was built. Indeed, the licensing system would not fall until after the Algerian War of Independence brought an end to colonial rule.

My research builds on a body of historical literature from the last fifty years that interprets the public health laws targeting the commercial sex market as a technique with which the state aimed to police women of the urban poor. In his 1978 study *Women for Hire: Prostitution and Sexuality in France after 1850*, Alain Corbin shows how the licensed institutions for the surveilled sale of sex managed and made profitable what was seen as an unbounded undercurrent of male sexual desire in French urban space.<sup>25</sup> To protect the bourgeois home from unrestrained male desire and the diseases that were vice's metaphor and consequence, regulations corralled women into licensed brothels and established sanitary dispensaries for the inspection of their genitals, implementing a social sewage system for which sex workers functioned as drainage. In the North African context, as Christelle Teraud argues in her definitive 2003 work *La Prostitution Coloniale : Algérie, Tunisie, Maroc, 1830–1962*, the regulation of prostitution and sexual hygiene also inscribed racial difference and policed the national bounds of the settler colony.<sup>26</sup> While Teraud outlines the racist justifications suggested by

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<sup>25</sup> Corbin, *Les Filles de Noce*.

<sup>26</sup> Christelle Teraud, *La Prostitution Coloniale : Algérie, Tunisie, Maroc, 1830–1962* (Paris: Payot, 2003).

French officials to maintain the system of licensed sex work in Algeria after the 1946 metropolitan ban, no study to date has placed this decision in its legal and political postwar context. This essay turns to the understudied archive of the decade leading up to the failed repeal to explain how and why French bureaucrats re-formulated the surveillance system to stem more radical change.

This essay highlights the strategies of control and resistive tactics at play in the struggle between colonial bureaucrats and sex workers over the state surveillance of commercial sex in the city of Algiers. It does so by interpreting the brothel as a political space in which gender ideologies and colonial difference were forged—a move inspired by Ann Laura Stoler’s *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule*.<sup>27</sup> Working from limited documentary evidence of women’s interactions with the colonial bureaucracy in Algiers, I interpret a field of women’s resistance, compliance, and negotiation under the repressive legal constraints with which they lived. But the limitations of this archive bespeak the colonial violence at play at the heart of the system: Data and statistics disaggregated by citizenship status infuse evidence about the sex market’s structure with a colonial argument for Algerian subjection, while settler women’s recourse to protective government institutions mean they dominate the archive of release requests.<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, how women negotiated with the system of controls and bureaucrats mobilized reformism to foreclose the abolition of those controls demonstrates how subjected people strategized with and against their oppressors, how citizenship set the terms of gender and class hierarchies in the colonial context, and

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<sup>27</sup> Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

<sup>28</sup> I owe the concept of archival violence and my commitment to reading the experiences of the marginalized from colonial documents to the methodology to Marisa J. Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive*, 1st edition, *Early American Studies* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 1.

how an empire seismically shaken by the Second World War struggled to maintain order before collapsing under the pressure to decolonize. That interest in the willingness of women to be medically governed within the legal framework of “public health” served the fundamentally repressive regulatory project opens important questions about the nature and possibilities of institutional reform.

Chapter One of this essay tells the history of state-licensed sex work in colonial Algiers from the beginning of the French occupation to the advent of the Second World War. It argues that the regime of “public hygiene” for managing commercial sex promoted the arbitrary exercise of police power against women of the urban poor, especially Algerians. Based on decades of statistics collected by police and colonial doctors, I demonstrate the system’s protracted failure to accomplish its stated aim to curtail sexually transmitted infections. I highlight the colonial and gender ideologies it drew on and, in turn, enforced. In Chapter Two, I examine the rhetorical figures and narrative scripts women deployed in appeals to the arbitrary authority of bureaucrats, doctors, and police. These files offer insight into the gender ideologies and labor relations enforced by the regulations, from the perspectives of women negotiating with the government over the conditions of their surveillance. Traces of the occupation appear throughout this section, so I also consider the pressures placed on the regime by the presence of Allied soldiers in the early 1940s. Part Three turns to the reforms of the postwar years to argue that a combination of military pressure, medical advancements, shifts in gender politics, limited legal reforms of the French empire, and women’s resistance led administrators to require and invoke sex workers’ medical consent as a shield against the potential abolition of controls. The colonial public health bureaucracy thus incorporated a growing interest in medical “consent” to extend and entrench its techniques of domination after the war.

## Chapter One

### “A Class of Public Prostitutes”: Sanitary Origins

#### *A Hygienic Occupation*

From its earliest days, the French colonial project in Algeria included a regime of sexual discipline, and the commercial sex market was among the first targets of public morality law. Officials first started to regulate sex work to protect European soldiers from sexually transmitted infections perceived to be more virulent in the Maghreb.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, just eight days after the French expeditionary forces seized Algiers on July 5, 1830, authorities established a police service to monitor the intimate encounter between French men and Algerian women.<sup>30</sup> A regulation from August 11, 1830, established a sanitary dispensary in the city of Algiers, surveilled by the lieutenant-general of the police and headed by a French surgeon. The law required women to register with the government and appear at the dispensary for weekly inspections of their genitals—sometimes more frequently, at the discretion of medical authorities—on pain of hefty fines.<sup>31</sup> Women surveilled under these regulations came to be known under the administrative category of *filles soumises*.<sup>32</sup>

The regulations, fully articulated in the fall of 1835, codified the exercise of arbitrary police power to bring women and girls under surveillance. “Every girl or woman known to be engaged in

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<sup>29</sup> Taraud, *La Prostitution Coloniale*, 19; Ellen Amster, “The Syphilitic Arab? A Search for Civilization in Disease Etiology, Native Prostitution, and French Colonial Medicine,” in *French Mediterraneans: Transnational and Imperial Histories*, ed. Patricia M. E. Lorcin and Todd Shepard, France Overseas: Studies in Empire and Decolonization (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016), 320.

<sup>30</sup> Christelle Taraud, “Colonial Regulationist Prostitution in the Maghreb and the Struggle for Abolition,” United Nations iLibrary (United Nations, July 19, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.18356/26f6ad16-en>.

<sup>31</sup> “Règlement de 11 Août 1830,” F80 668, Gouvernement Général, Série F80, Sous-Série 668, Dossier: “Filles soumises, dispensaires (1830–1858),” ANOM.

<sup>32</sup> Corbin, *Les Filles de Noce*, 50.

prostitution,” the decree began, “will be registered by the chief police commissioner of the Central Bureau on a register kept for this purpose by the said bureau.”<sup>33</sup> The law’s explicit reference to “girls” indicates that the branch of police tasked with upholding public morality, the *police des mœurs*, arrested and registered children as *filles soumises*. The only protection against false arrest mentioned in the body of the law was the stipulation that registration should take place only after “precise information had been gathered on the girl or woman involved.”<sup>34</sup> That is, “notoriety” sufficed to condemn a woman to the registers in the period of unstandardized colonial bureaucracy during which reputation stood in place of due process as a bulwark against police power. The law required *filles soumises* seeking release from the register to petition the chief police commissioner, who had the power to decide based on the information about the petitioner submitted to the civil attendant.<sup>35</sup> If the *police des mœurs* identified a formerly registered woman working unlicensed, her release could be revoked.<sup>36</sup>

The regulations authorized extensive surveillance—of women’s lives, by the police, and of their bodies, by medical authorities. Together, the punitive and curative branches of the colonial administration collaborated to bring and keep all sex workers under the official gaze. Police power drew on medical authority by fastening itself to public health discourse: “All registered women and girls,” Article Three of the 1835 law reads, “will be required to conform to sanitary measures prescribed by the administration to prevent the propagation of contagious diseases which they might

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<sup>33</sup> “Arrêté,” September 28, 1835, Art. 1, F80 668, ANOM. *Toute fille ou femme notoirement livrée à la prostitution sera inscrite par les soins du Commissaire de Police Chef au Bureau Central, sur un registre tenu à cet effet au dit bureau.*

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., Art. 2. *Cette inscription n’aura lieu qu’après avoir recueilli des renseignements précis sur la fille ou femme qui en sera l’objet.*

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., Art. 5.

<sup>36</sup> Teraud, *La Prostitution Coloniale*, 66.



have contracted.”<sup>37</sup> Each *fille soumise* received a card from the chief police commissioner that served as a medical visa, printed with her identification details, including her name and home address, alongside columns for officials to mark off each sanitary inspection and confirm payment of the monthly dispensary fees.<sup>38</sup> The general police commission collected the five-franc taxes mandated by the 1830 law and apportioned them to maintain the facilities.<sup>39</sup> (A chart for the city of Algiers from March 1837 tracking the taxes collected from “*filles indigènes*” indicates that Algerian *filles soumises* might have paid double that: ten francs per month.)<sup>40</sup> The law required women registered as *filles soumises* to present their registration cards to agents of the civil and military police in order to move around the territory of Algeria.<sup>41</sup> Women found to be infected at one of their weekly examinations could be detained at the dispensary for immediate isolation and treatment; those tested in their homes were transported to the nearest dispensary by the police.<sup>42</sup>

The sanitary dispensary served both a material and an epistemic function, each with a punitive and a productive aspect. Spatially, the dispensary was a site of discipline in which *filles soumises* were both cared for and controlled through mandated weekly inspections. The line between care and control was conspicuously thin: women could be detained if found infected and arrested if non-compliant, and it was the *police des mœurs* who maintained the register of *filles soumises*.<sup>43</sup> In the field

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<sup>37</sup> “Arrêté,” Art. 3, F80 668, ANOM. *Les femmes ou filles ainsi inscrites seront tenues de se conformer aux mesures sanitaires prescrites par l’administration pour prévenir la propagation des maladies contagieuses dont elles peuvent être atteintes.*

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., Art. 4.

<sup>39</sup> “Règlement de 11 Août 1830,” F80 668, ANOM; “Arrêté Du 27 Mars 1831,” F80 668, ANOM.

<sup>40</sup> “État des filles indigènes entretenues pour lesquelles on paie La rétribution mensuelle ...,” March 1837, F80 668, ANOM.

<sup>41</sup> Taraud, *La Prostitution Coloniale*, 58.

<sup>42</sup> “Arrêté,” Art. 11, F80 668, ANOM.

<sup>43</sup> “Cahier de change, du 25 Juillet 1835,” July 25, 1835, F80 668, ANOM.

of discourse, the dispensary produced a surfeit of knowledge about sex workers as potential vectors of disease. As early as 1831, dispensary reports entered the official archives detailing “the number of women entered for treatment” and types of expenditures on their health.<sup>44</sup> By 1836, the dispensary reports had started keeping track of women’s nationalities and ethnicities to disaggregate their medical records based on colonial imaginaries of social difference.<sup>45</sup>

Dispensaires françois  
Dont le total de l'Algérie.

*État récapitulatif des femmes publiques traitées au Dispensaire de la ville d'Alger pendant l'année 1835.*

Séances que le traitement concerne.	Nombre des femmes pour nations.							Total pour l'année.	Nombre de journées de traitement.	Total général des Dispensaires.	Prix moyen de la journée.	Observations.	
	françoises	italiennes	marocaines	algériennes	maltaises	malines	autres						
1 <sup>re</sup> Séance.	12	129	15	22	5	15	5	289	435	10,669	6,195.91	3.57.01	<p>En 1835 le nombre des femmes traitées au Dispensaire de la ville d'Alger a été de 1,029.            Le nombre de journées de traitement de ces femmes a été de 10,669.            Le prix moyen de la journée de traitement a été de 6,195.91.            Le total des dépenses de traitement a été de 65,570.01.            Les femmes traitées au Dispensaire de la ville d'Alger pendant l'année 1835 ont été au nombre de 1,029.            Dans le total des dépenses de traitement il y a été compris le prix des médicaments.</p>
2 <sup>e</sup> Séance.	25	117	15	25	1	17	8	208					
Totales.	37	246	30	47	6	32	13	497					

Le Sous-Directeur Civil.  
 Le Directeur des Bureaux d'Alger, et de l'Algérie.  
 Paris, le 15 Mars 1836.

Figure 1.1. “Recapitulative State of Public Women Treated at the Dispensary of the City of Algiers Curing the Year 1835.” F80 668, Gouvernement Général, Série F80, Sous-Série 668, Dossier: “Filles soumises, dispensaires (1830–1858),” Archives nationales d’outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence, France.

The charts produced by these dispensaries later came to furnish regulators with racialized biomedical justifications for the surveillance regime by underwriting notions of “native” disease.

By the 1840s, a standardized vocabulary of colonial difference in the record had solidified out of the national and ethnic categories coalescing in the earlier reports. At this point, dispensary record-

<sup>44</sup> “Dispensaire : mouvement et dépenses de l’établissement depuis le 1er avril 1831 jusqu’au 31 décembre 1837,” January 23, 1838, F80 668, ANOM.

<sup>45</sup> “État récapitulatif des femmes publiques traitées au Dispensaire de la ville d’Alger pendant l’année 1835.” n.d., F80 668, ANOM.

keepers grouped *filles soumises* by citizenship status: as settler citizens or as “*indigènes*,” a legal category meaning “native” and denoting the rightlessness of colonial subjecthood. A report on the Algiers dispensary from December 1849 submitted to the Minister of War in Paris, for example, arranged the 463 *filles publiques* (public women) counted by the end of the month in a table of “nationalities.” European women—French, Spanish, Mahonese, Italian, German, and Anglo-Spanish—totaled 211. Bracketed under the category *indigène*, the paperwork includes “*Arabes, Juives, Mulatresses,*” and “*Negresses,*” who totaled 252.<sup>46</sup>

**FILLES PUBLIQUES.**

L'effectif au 31 décembre dernier était de . . . . . 156  
 Il en a été inscrites pendant le mois . . . . . 16  
 Total . . . . . 172

Radées du contrôle pendant le mois . . . . . 2  
 Effectif au 31 Décembre 1849 . . . . . 463

NATIONALITES

Françaises . . . . .	106
Espagnoles . . . . .	66
Mahonnaises . . . . .	2
Italiennes . . . . .	3
Allemandes . . . . .	28
Anglo-Espagnoles . . . . .	3
Arabes . . . . .	213
Juives . . . . .	22
Mulatresses . . . . .	2
Nègresses . . . . .	20
Total égal . . . . .	463

Alger, le 20 Janvier 1850.  
 Le Commissaire de Police du dispensaire,  
*Bayard*

Figure 1.2: “The Prefect of Algiers to the Minister of War, Transmission of the States of Movement of the Dispensaries of Algiers and Blidah, during the month of December 1849.” January 20, 1850. F80 668, Gouvernement Général, Série F80, Sous-Série 668, Dossier: “*Filles soumises, dispensaires (1830–1858)*,” Archives nationales d’outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence, France.

<sup>46</sup> “Le Préfet d’Alger à Monsieur le Ministre de la Guerre, Transmission des états de mouvement des Dispensaires d’Alger et de Blidah, pendant le mois de décembre 1849,” January 20, 1850, F80 668, ANOM.

The table offers some insight into how a colonial hierarchy distinguishing European settlers from Algerians worked within (and without) the sphere of commercial sex. It shows, first, the precision with which the colonial government distinguished European nationalities. The four categories at the bottom of the chart, by contrast, designated—and, in some sense, produced—what today might be called racial or ethnic categories. The consolidation of the legal and political category of the *indigène* as a distinctly racialized other manifests in the bracket grouping at the bottom. Decades of dispensary charts show medical professionals and colonial bureaucrats inscribing racial difference in the process of their surveillance.

### *Commercial Sex in the Colonial City*

In 1837, a French theorist conducting research in the city of Paris consolidated the principles already being exercised in the course of the Algerian occupation into a body of thought that came to be known as “regulationism.” Alexandre J. B. Parent-Duchâtelet had a background in medicine but spent the two decades preceding his landmark study, *De la prostitution de la ville de Paris*, in the field of “hygiene.”<sup>47</sup> He became known for entering the sewers of Paris with sanitation workers as part of his research into urban public health.<sup>48</sup> His shift to the study of sex work was fitting because, as Alain Corbin put it in *Women for Hire*, Duchâtelet saw sex work as an “excremental phenomenon that

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<sup>47</sup> Alexandre-Jean-Baptiste Parent-Duchâtelet, Jean Baptiste Baillièrè, and François Leuret, *De La Prostitution Dans La Ville de Paris, Considérée Sous Le Rapport de l'hygiène Publique, de La Morale et de l'administration...*, vol. I (Paris: chez J.-B. Baillièrè, 1837), iv–v, <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/009317205>.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, I:9.

protects the social body from illness.”<sup>49</sup> That is, according to the regulationist theory, a perennial underclass of sex workers was socially necessary to drain the sexual waste of urban society—its excess male virility, its ambient vice—away from bourgeois women and girls and into a regulated market for paid sex.<sup>50</sup> As the specter of sexually transmitted infections loomed over the socially reproductive French family, regulationism proposed “a class of public prostitutes” as the antidote. Parent-Duchâtelet’s regulations defined this class by the very marginality they guaranteed by legally targeting, isolating, and policing sex workers of the urban poor.<sup>51</sup> The copious records kept by the doctors performing medical inspections in Algeria reveal how the settler-colonial project structured and fragmented this sexual underclass.

In colonial cities, the politics of social hygiene and urban development had racist connotations unconsidered by the metropolitan theorists of state-regulated sex. In 1881, the conclusion of martial rule in Algeria transferred the responsibility of the regulations to the municipal authority, and the state regulation of sex work intertwined with the growth of the city.<sup>52</sup> The state-licensed brothel, or *maison de tolérance*, came to be associated with the settler women either born in Algeria or who migrated there expressly to enter a commercial sex market geared towards settler men.<sup>53</sup> A 1938 report by Maurice Raynaud, a clinical professor at the Algiers Faculty of Medicine and president of the Algerian Association for the Prophylaxis of Venereal Diseases, indicated that the forty-five *maisons de tolérance*

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<sup>49</sup> Corbin, *Les Filles de Noce*, 16.

<sup>50</sup> Charles Bernheimer, *Figures of Ill Repute: Representing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century France* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 19.

<sup>51</sup> Corbin, *Les Filles de Noce*, 17.

<sup>52</sup> Teraud, *La Prostitution Coloniale*, 19.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

in Algiers were mostly staffed by French women, although they comprised but a third of the registered sex workers in the city.<sup>54</sup> These *maisons* established the racialized bounds of commercial sex, consolidating the market for sex with women of European descent. The unofficial segregation of clients by citizenship status, by contrast, was inconsistently enforced: “*maisons ‘indigènes’*” also served European men, whose health the institution had been founded to protect.<sup>55</sup> In this context, unlike in metropolitan France, the institutions in which (or outside of which) sex workers operated denoted and enforced national distinctions.

Efforts to raid unlicensed establishments, round up so-called *clandestines* (unregistered sex workers) working under the government’s radar, and broaden sanitary controls reinscribed colonial difference. According to official counts, the majority of Algerian *filles soumises* worked *en isolées*: that is, they were subject to sanitary controls but did not work in licensed brothels. Raynaud reported that 415 of the 600 registered sex workers across Algiers in 1938 were Algerian, largely working *en isolées*, or “in isolation,” out of small shops in the casbah, “where one sometimes finds a bed, most often a mat or a mattress on the ground, a basin and a water pitcher.”<sup>56</sup> Such patterns were legally sanctioned: The casbah was the only zone in Algiers where public prostitution (outside of the *maison de tolérance*) and solicitation were authorized.<sup>57</sup> With state-licensed spaces largely populated by settler women, almost any establishment (hotels, cafés, bars) in the casbah could be a potential threat to the moral hygiene of

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<sup>54</sup> “Note 1943,” n.d., GGA 4U 54, Gouvernement Général de l’Algérie, Série 4, Sous-Série U, Boîte 54, ANOM; M. M. Raynaud, L. Colonieu, and E. Hadida, “L’Organisation de la lutte antivénéérienne en Algérie” (Algérie, 1938), 10, GGA 4U 54, ANOM.

<sup>55</sup> Taraud, *La Prostitution Coloniale*, 135.

<sup>56</sup> Raynaud, Colonieu, and Hadida, “L’Organisation de la lutte antivénéérienne en Algérie,” 10–11, GGA 4U 54, ANOM. ... où l’on trouve quelquefois un lit, le plus souvent une nette ou un matelas à terre, une cuvette et un broc à eau.

<sup>57</sup> Taraud, *La Prostitution Coloniale*, 149.

the city. Moreover, police could legally round up any woman “engaging in solicitation in the public eye or in a public place and disturbing order by being noticed in a provocative outfit or attitude,” bring her to the commissariat, interrogate her, and potentially detain her in a cell.<sup>58</sup> In 1935, the police cracked down on unauthorized *lieux de débauche* (“debauched places”), urging landlords to expel tenants who served solicited clients in their buildings.<sup>59</sup> In an urban environment in which state-licensed brothels were peopled primarily by European women and Algerian women were assumed to operate under the radar, such an augmentation of police power overwhelmingly targeted the *casbahs*.

Racist biomedical science linking sexually transmitted infections to Arab populations and the colonial obsession with preventing “racial (and not merely sexual) ‘contamination’” led medical bureaucrats to produce decades of manuscripts representing “‘indigenous’ prostitution ... as ‘endemic’ and dangerous for the French colonial order.”<sup>60</sup> Behind the official statistics, fears of unregistered Algerian sex workers spreading disease empowered the unchecked exercise of police force to round up and register *clandestines*. “Registered women,” Maurice Raynaud estimated in 1938,

represent but an infinite minority. Next to them, *clandestines* live outside of all regulations, evading all *contrôle sanitaire* and constituting the most dangerous source of contaminations by far. Their number is impossible to determine, even approximately. They are, in the opinion of the *service des mœurs*, four to five times more numerous than registered women.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Teraud, *La Prostitution Coloniale*, 59.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.* 127.

<sup>61</sup> Raynaud, Colonieu, and Hadida, “L’Organisation de la lutte antivénérienne en Algérie,” 11, GGA 4U 54, ANOM. *Les femmes cartées ne représentent qu’une infime minorité. À côté d’elles, les clandestines vivent en marge des règlements, se soustraient à tout contrôle sanitaire et constituent de beaucoup la source la plus dangereuse des contaminations. Leur nombre est impossible à fixer même approximativement, elles sont de l’avis du service des mœurs, 4 à 5 fois plus nombreuses que les cartées.*

In the city of Algiers, for example, in addition to the 580–600 *filles soumises* on the registers that year, the *police des mœurs* estimated roughly 3,000 *clandestines*.<sup>62</sup> For these women, Raynaud wrote, “infection is the rule.”<sup>63</sup> His conclusion that “unmonitored prostitution remains the greatest purveyor of venereal disease” in Algeria supported the regime’s founding logic: increased surveillance, increased registration, and increased police power should, by rendering the invisible visible—the *clandestine* surveilled—alone curb the spread of infections.<sup>64</sup>

Officials in Algiers, however, never accomplished their aim to bring more than a few hundred women under sanitary controls, and in the system’s failure lies evidence of resistance. Despite the police’s best efforts to round up and card so-called *clandestines* and subject them to mandatory medical examinations, the number of *filles soumises* in Algiers only minorly increased over a century of colonial rule. Between 1850 and 1940 in Algiers, the total number of *filles soumises* remained almost constant, between 500 and 600.<sup>65</sup> Moreover, despite French bureaucrats’ best efforts at limiting their freedom of movement, registered sex workers found ways to evade government surveillance: Raynaud reported that across Algiers province, in 1940, of the 849 sex workers who declared a change of address, 421 disappeared.<sup>66</sup> As for women evading registration, “The *clandestine* who suspects she is surveilled,” he later warned, “will use all manner of subterfuge to avoid being caught out. She shies

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<sup>62</sup> Raynaud, Colonieu, and Hadida, “L’Organisation de la lutte antivénérienne en Algérie,” 10, GGA 4U 54, ANOM.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 12. ... *la prostitution non surveillée reste la grande pourvoyeuse des maladies vénériennes ...*

<sup>65</sup> Teraud, *La Prostitution Coloniale*, 67.

<sup>66</sup> Le Professeur M. Raynaud à Monsieur Le Directeur de La Sécurité Générale, September 15, 1941, 3, 91 1K 500, ANOM.



away, she hides. Hunted, she changes towns to practice her dangerous industry elsewhere.”<sup>67</sup> The “subterfuge” of the *clandestine* bespeaks an extended and consistent pattern of women’s resistance to the incursions of the surveillance regime.

### *The Anti-Venereal Struggle*

Proponents of the regulations did not recognize the system’s failure as a product of women’s resistance but as an example of bureaucratic mismanagement. Indeed, from the 1880s to the dawn of the Second World War, colonial officials had reorganized Algerian public health infrastructure several times over, with little success.<sup>68</sup> Interest grew in better aligning the *police des mœurs*’ behavior with the regulations’ medical mandate. A set of 1929 instructions sent from the Ministry of the Interior to the Ministry of Work, Hygiene, Social Assistance and Foresight criticized the state of Algeria’s anti-venereal dispensaries as “cramped, ill-disposed, ill-lit, and miserable-looking buildings, immediately neighboring *maisons de tolérance*. The use of municipal premises is rarely much better.”<sup>69</sup> By 1941, the regional director of health and assistance and the director of health and the family for the general government of Algeria, Dr. Grenoilleau, described the colonial bureaucracy’s inability to sufficiently

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<sup>67</sup> Maurice Raynaud, L. Colonieu, and E. Hadida, “Organisation de La Lutte Antivénérienne” (unpublished draft), 1947, 5, GGA 4U 54, ANOM. *La clandestine qui se sent surveillée va user de tous les subterfuges pour éviter d’être prise en défaut. Elle se dérobe, elle se cache. Traquée, elle change de ville pour aller exercer ailleurs sa dangereuse industrie.*

<sup>68</sup> G. Grenoilleau, “Rapport sur la réorganisation de la Santé publique en Algérie,” 1941, 5–6, 9P186.7, *Service historique de la défense*, Vincennes, France.

<sup>69</sup> André Tardieu, Ministre de l’Intérieur et le Ministre du Travail, de l’Hygiène, de l’Assistance et de la Prévoyance Sociales à Messieurs Les Préfets, “Instructions générales relatives aux instructions dans lesquelles devra s’exercer la surveillance sanitaire des prostituées,” July 3, 1929, GGA 4U 55, Gouvernement Général de l’Algérie, Série 4, Sous-Série U, Boîte 55., ANOM. *On a utilisé dans beaucoup de villes des immeubles exigus mal disposés, mal éclairés et d’aspect misérable, au voisinage immédiat des maisons de tolérance. L’emploi de locaux municipaux n’est souvent pas plus heureux.*

provide for public health and preventative medicine.<sup>70</sup> Especially where sexually transmitted infections were concerned, Grenoilleau warned that the government lacked a coordinated “overall program.”

Laudatory statistics, he said, could be misleading: Although in 1941 he tallied the number of specialized facilities at five or six in all of Algeria, a file in the colonial archives estimates the number at seventy-three in Algiers province alone.<sup>71</sup> “The Algerian health organization,” he concluded, “has undeniably suffered so far from a lack of unity of views, absence of program and technical guidelines.”<sup>72</sup> The solution proposed was to centralize.

Administrators’ efforts to impose such a unified program in the form of *la lutte antivénéérienne*, or “anti-venereal struggle,” became a racialized and racializing project. From 1860 to 1925, as Ellen Amster has shown, the French medical profession had consolidated a series of symptoms observed in North Africa “to invent a physiological racial type, the degenerate and diseased ‘syphilitic Arab.’”<sup>73</sup> The statistical arguments Raynaud and his colleagues deployed in favor of their “struggle” bore this medical racism out. For example, Raynaud tabulated syphilis, gonorrhea, and canker cases for the Brault dispensary in Algiers from 1936 to 1938 to illustrate “the spread of the venereal scourge, particularly among the natives, and the necessity to organize a strong response.”<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Grenoilleau, “Rapport sur la réorganisation de la Santé publique en Algérie,” 4, 9P186.7, ANOM.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 15; “Liste des dispensaires antivénéériens du département d’Alger,” 1941, GGA 4U 54, ANOM.

<sup>72</sup> Grenoilleau, “Rapport sur la réorganisation de la Santé publique en Algérie,” 26, 9P186.7, ANOM. *L’organisation sanitaire Algérienne a incontestablement souffert jusqu’ici d’un manque d’unité de vues, d’absence de programme et de directives techniques.*

<sup>73</sup> Amster, “The Syphilitic Arab? A Search for Civilization in Disease Etiology, Native Prostitution, and French Colonial Medicine,” 320.

<sup>74</sup> Raynaud, Colonieu, and Hadida, “L’Organisation de la lutte antivénéérienne en Algérie,” 11, GGA 4U 54, ANOM. *Ces chiffres sont suffisamment éloquents, ils montrent l’importance du fléau vénérien, tout particulièrement chez les indigènes, et la nécessité d’organiser une lutte sévère.*

Il serait intéressant de pouvoir donner une courbe épidémiologique de chacune de ces affections, mais les statistiques anciennes ne permettent pas de le faire avec exactitude. Voici pour les deux dernières années seulement les chiffres recueillis au dispensaire BRAULT :

		Européens	Indigènes	Total
Syphilis	(1936)	93	57	150
	(1937)	20	56	76
	(1938 (1er trimestre))	8	37	45
Blennorragie	(1936)	449	427	876
	(1937)	426	607	1033
	(1938 (1er trimestre))	71	154	225
Chancrelle	(1936)	40	139	179
	(1937)	20	136	156
	(1938 (1er trimestre))	6	71	77

Ces chiffres sont suffisamment éloquents, ils montrent l'importance du fléau vénérien, tout particulièrement chez les indigènes, et la nécessité d'organiser une lutte sévère.

Figure 1.3: M. Raynaud, L. Colonieu, and E. Hadida, "L'Organisation de la lutte antivénérienne en Algérie," 1938, 10, GGA 4U 54, Gouvernement Général d'Algérie, Série 4, Sous-Série U, Boîte 54, Archives nationales d'outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

However, Raynaud took the data out of context. The report does not indicate, for example, how many people had passed through the dispensary, which would have given proportion to the rate of infection by citizenship status. Given Raynaud's contention that Algerian women comprised two-thirds of the sex workers in Algiers, the difference in raw infection numbers between settlers and Algerians does not seem statistically significant.<sup>75</sup> Data on sexually transmitted infections collected and interpreted within the racist rubric of the settler colony authorized increased policing and surveillance in the casbahs to protect settler society from disease.

Under the pretenses of *la lutte antivénérienne*, officials expanded and entrenched regulatory controls in Algeria by transforming the medical profession into an arm of the surveillance state. *La loi du 29 novembre 1939* empowered doctors who treated patients ("of one or the other sex") who had

<sup>75</sup> Raynaud, Colonieu, and Hadida, "L'Organisation de la lutte antivénérienne en Algérie," 10, GGA 4U 54, ANOM.

exposed multiple individuals to notify “the sanitary authority.”<sup>76</sup> The law established the right of an inspector to demand a certificate of non-contagion from “persons whom he can, by reason of serious, precise, and concordant presumptions, consider to be suffering from an STI and spreading it.”<sup>77</sup> In addition to the new emphasis on sanitary surveillance, information collection techniques on *filles soumises* exploded. A 1941 administrative regulation suggested by Raynaud required every registered woman to provide the central register with her full name, parents’ names, date and place of birth, full employment history, home address, and place of work, as well as six photographs.<sup>78</sup> Doctors obtained the right to requisition registration cards for inspection.<sup>79</sup> Thus, in the 1930s, fears about sexually transmitted infections incited renewed interest among colonial doctors and bureaucrats to expand, rather than relinquish, the state surveillance of sex work—and the power of the *police des mœurs* to enforce it. Indeed, as Raynaud wrote in 1938,

One would not conclude that because it is incomplete, all control becomes useless; let us rather try to generalize it, to extend it to all prostitutes by carrying out a severe fight against clandestine prostitution. Any prophylaxis will remain in vain as long as the clandestine prostitute is not repressed.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Albert Lebrun et al., “Décret Relatif à La Prophylaxie Des Maladies Vénéériennes,” *Journal Officiel de La République Française : Lois et Décrets* Jeudi 7 Décembre 1939, no. 303 (November 7, 1939), 13748, Art. 1, GGA 4U 55, ANOM.

<sup>77</sup> Lebrun et al., “Décret Relatif à La Prophylaxie Des Maladies Vénéériennes,” 13748, Art. 4, GGA 4U 55, ANOM.

<sup>78</sup> Maurice Raynaud, “Règlement Administratif de La Prostitution,” September 15, 1941, Art. 3, 91 1K 500, ANOM.

<sup>79</sup> Taraud, *La Prostitution Coloniale : Algérie, Tunisie, Maroc, 1830–1962*, 58.

<sup>80</sup> Raynaud, Colonieu, and Hadida, “L’Organisation de la lutte antivénéérienne en Algérie,” 13. *On ne serait conclure que, du fait qu’il est incomplet, tout contrôle devient inutile ; essayons plutôt de le généraliser, de l’étendre à toutes les prostituées en menant une lutte sévère contre la prostitution clandestine. Toute prophylaxie restera vaine, tant que la prostituée clandestine ne sera pas réprimée.*

*Public Health and the War*

Urgency around the curtailment of sexually transmitted infections surged with the gendered migrations of military personnel throughout the Second World War. In Algiers, the frenzy heightened with the landings of 3,000 British and 10,000 U.S. troops in November 1942.<sup>81</sup> Allied leaflets dropped across North Africa announced the bid to protect the territory from German and Italian invasion, and high-profile leaders of the Resistance rallied support for the occupying forces.<sup>82</sup> But North Africa's "liberators" brought a new demand for commercial sex that strained the public health infrastructures of Algeria's colonial government. After this moment, the brothel and the dispensary became twin matters of national security for both occupying troops and occupied North Africa. When sexually transmitted infection rates rose, removing increasing numbers of soldiers from combat, accusations of conspiracy, collaboration, and sabotage settled squarely in the field of the intimate. As French regulators struggled to police the health of sex workers to protect the health of soldiers, a wave of new efforts to hunt down the infamous *clandestine* crested across France and extended to its empire.

In an atmosphere of panic about sexually transmitted infections, American and British military authorities sought to make use of the public health infrastructure implemented by the colonial government in Algeria to safeguard the health of the troops. Legislators in both countries

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<sup>81</sup> Charles M. Wiltse, *The Medical Department: Medical Service in the Mediterranean and Minor Theaters*, United States Army in World War II: The Technical Services (Washington: Office of the Chief of Military History, Dept. of the Army; for sale by the Superintendent of Documents, U. S. Govt. Print. Off., 1965), 105, <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/000814166>.

<sup>82</sup> "British Navy, R. A. F. Aided U. S. Landings," *Dundee Courier*, November 9, 1942, British Library Newspapers; "Algiers Occupied by the Americans in Great New Offensive in North Africa," *Aberdeen Journal*, November 9, 1942, British Library Newspapers, <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/JA3238645461/BNCN?sid=bookmark-BNCN&xid=31418bd9>; "The Time Has Come," *Aberdeen Journal*, November 9, 1942, British Library Newspapers, <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/JA3238645466/BNCN?sid=bookmark-BNCN&xid=0d9fc9f0>.

were passing domestic emergency measures to crack down on sex work as STI rates spiked.<sup>83</sup> In November 1942, British Parliament made it an offense for any person identified by two separate STI patients as the source of their infection to fail to present for treatment.<sup>84</sup> In the United States, the Social Protection Division of the Federal Security Agency led a national campaign against prostitution, the Public Health Service implemented a network of “rapid treatment centers” to detain and treat sex workers against their will, and the 1941 May Act outlawed all forms of sex work near army camps.<sup>85</sup> But implementation of the May Act lagged—if it took place at all—as American soldiers began to disembark abroad.<sup>86</sup> U.S. military high command kept their efforts to regulate the troops’ contact with sex workers discreet, largely to protect the reputation of soldiers from domestic scrutiny.<sup>87</sup>

The Allies invaded Algiers to find 46 *maisons de tolérance*, 115 stores, 79 hotels designated specifically for sex work, 600 buildings reserved for declared sex workers, and one hundred *maisons clandestines*.<sup>88</sup> “Immediately after the invasion,” U.S. military authorities made an arrangement with

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<sup>83</sup> Pamela Cox, “Compulsion, Voluntarism, and Venereal Disease: Governing Sexual Health in England after the Contagious Diseases Acts,” *Journal of British Studies* 46, no. 1 (2007): 96, <https://doi.org/10.1086/508400>.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Sonya O. Rose, “The ‘Sex Question’ in Anglo-American Relations in the Second World War,” *The International History Review* 20, no. 4 (1998): 146; John Parascandola, “Quarantining Women: Venereal Disease Rapid Treatment Centers in World War II America,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 83, no. 3 (Fall 2009): 431–59; Mary Louise Roberts, “The Price of Discretion: Prostitution, Venereal Disease, and the American Military in France, 1944—1946,” *The American Historical Review* 115, no. 4 (2010): 1007.

<sup>86</sup> Roberts, “The Price of Discretion,” 1007.

<sup>87</sup> Mary Louise Roberts, *What Soldiers Do: Sex and the American GI in World War II France* (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2013), 2.

<sup>88</sup> “Rapport Du Préfecture d’Alger,” 1942, Fonds du Gouverneur général de l’Algérie, Cote 8, CAB 34, Dossier : “Prostitution et alcoolisme, 1938–42,” ANOM; as cited in Taraud, *La Prostitution Coloniale*, 138. ... 46 *maisons de tolérance*, 115 *magasins*, 79 *hôtels spécifiquement réservés à la prostitution*, 600 *immeubles déclarés et au moins une centaine de maisons clandestine*.

French officials in Algeria about how to co-manage the market for commercial sex.<sup>89</sup> Leonard Heaton, Surgeon General of the U.S. Army at the time he prepared his report in 1960, wrote that when American authorities met the vast system of state-regulated sex implemented by the French in Algeria, any notion of suppressing prostitution altogether “was immediately abandoned as impractical because of the magnitude of the problem and because civil authorities were very unsympathetic to the idea.”<sup>90</sup> Instead, they decided to “place certain areas off limits to U.S. troops but to allow them free access to certain of the better houses of prostitution over which close supervision was maintained.”<sup>91</sup> The authorities sought to direct soldiers into spaces licensed and managed by the French colonial government.<sup>92</sup>

Coloniality structured the Allied approach to paid sex, as well. British authorities only provided free condoms to soldiers posted abroad, and STI prevention policies only applied

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<sup>89</sup> Leonard D. Heaton et al., *Communicable Diseases Transmitted through Contact or by Unknown Means*, Medical Department, United States Army, in *World War II* (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Surgeon General, Dept. of the Army: For sale by the Supt. of Docs., U.S. G.P.O., 1960), 208, <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/011421335>.

<sup>90</sup> Heaton et al., 207.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 208.

<sup>92</sup> Although beyond the scope of this paper, sexual violence was also a prominent feature of the Allied occupation of North Africa. In 2006, historian Lamia Benyoussef interviewed four women from Béja, Tunisia, who lived through the invasion and testified to this fact. Jamila Zouaghi, the then-illiterate daughter of a farming family in a rural region ten miles outside of the city, for example, recalled that Allied soldiers often asked for Fatmas, or “native prostitutes.” Benyoussef’s research, moreover, details a pattern of sexual violence imprinted on the written archive: The Commander of the French Forces in Algeria, Henri Giraud, for example, informed General Eisenhower on March 31, 1943, that “U.S. and British troops have molested, assaulted, and killed natives.” Giraud’s chief of staff later reported to Allied Forces Headquarters “the continuing cases of rape in the forward areas against Arab women.” According to an April 1943 investigation conducted by the French, Allied soldiers gang-raped six Arab women over the course of two days in the Algerian village of Le Tarf, bordering Tunisia, and the British reporter Alan Moorhead documented similar incidents while at Thibar, near Béja. For more on this, see Lamia Benyoussef, “Year of the Typhus: Operation Torch through the Eyes of Tunisian Women, or How to Make the Holocaust an Arab Story?,” *International Journal of Francophone Studies* 17, no. 1 (January 2014): 56–7, [https://doi.org/10.1386/ijfs.17.1.51\\_7](https://doi.org/10.1386/ijfs.17.1.51_7).

surveillance measures to brothels in “foreign locations.”<sup>93</sup> The Americans brought fantasies of Islamic sexual difference to North African soil: landing forces received booklets “full of practical hints on behavior in a Moslem country,” according to one British reporter, informing soldiers that “to talk to a woman is regarded by their menfolk as an insult.” Indeed, the booklets warned,

The difference between peaceful and friendly relations with the natives on one hand and serious difficulty on the other may depend on whether or not every single one of us understands and respects the very special outlook the Moslems have towards women.<sup>94</sup>

Thus, in Algiers, according to Heaton, “the native brothel section was put off limits immediately after the invasion.”<sup>95</sup> In fact, American soldiers were forbidden access to the casbah altogether, “not particularly as a venereal disease control measure but because it was regarded as too dangerous a place for U.S. troops to visit.” Troops could access “Four large brothels and a large number of hotels,” each staffed by one to three women. In the evenings, officers alone could access “the largest and most ornate of these brothels, the Sphinx,” and “enlisted men and civilians were admitted during the daytime.” Yet troops frequently attributed STI cases to women working in these brothels, so “this system was regarded as unsatisfactory.” It was not until 1943 that the brothels were made off-limits by American military authorities; “enforcement, however, was rather lax.”<sup>96</sup>

As the protracted *lutte antivénéérienne* has shown, the system of regulated sex work was ill-equipped to eradicate sexually transmitted infections even in periods of normal demand, so the encounter with the Allies must have placed a strain on the already struggling public health

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<sup>93</sup> Philippa Levine, *Prostitution, Race, and Politics: Policing Venereal Disease in the British Empire* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 172.

<sup>94</sup> “Union Jack over Algiers,” *Evening Telegraph*, November 9, 1942, British Library Newspapers.

<sup>95</sup> Heaton et al., 208.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 210.



infrastructure. That American and British authorities confined their soldiers to licensed spaces in settler neighborhoods indicates the faith they had in the French system of sanitary controls. And indeed, Suzanne's story suggests that Allied authorities held French medical personnel responsible for guaranteeing that European *filles soumises* be STI-free. Colonial bureaucrats remained convinced that the real threat of infection emanated from the *clandestine*. Thus, even during the occupation, the *police des mœurs* continued to prowl the streets to bring more women to the registers. The section that follows investigates women's attempts to circumvent the renewed power of the *police des mœurs* during the bureaucratic struggle to extend and entrench the regulation of the sex market in 1940s Algiers.

## Chapter Two

### “If I Were a Woman of Ill Repute”: *Filles Soumises* Request Release

A series of case files from the early 1940s demonstrates how women negotiated over their conditions of unfreedom with colonial bureaucrats, doctors, and police during and after the occupation—and how these officials, in turn, struggled to re-assert local authority and expand “sanitary control.” Indeed, a groundswell in efforts to expand government surveillance of the commercial sex market took place in postwar Algiers. Requests for removal from official registers filed in the early 1940s reveal protracted negotiations between women and the coterie of authorities tasked with surveilling them. *Filles soumises* hoping to leave the registers wrote letters to colonial administrators (generally prefects) applying for release; the prefects, in turn, circulated these requests to public health officials and the *police des mœurs*, each of whom could weigh in based on medical and social surveillance. The files reveal a confused and coercive bureaucracy at work. Within this ad hoc regime that licensed arbitrary use of police force and provided no due process, each case includes a letter telling the story most likely to convince the petty bureaucrats who were both judge and jury. To this end, women had a limited repertoire of narratives of their worthiness to be released. How and when women deployed these narratives reveals as much about day-to-day life under sanitary surveillance in Algeria as about how the public health regime policed the bounds of respectable womanhood.

*Public Service: Madame Ladouze and Renée Rochas*

On July 24, 1944, Renée Rochas wrote a letter by hand to the prefect of Algiers requesting an audience, following a meeting with General Charles de Gaulle, to discuss “a delicate affair”: her false arrest for prostitution.<sup>97</sup> Within a month, and after extensive correspondence, on August 29, 1944, the commissioner of police informed Rochas of her release from sanitary control—that is, she would be removed from the register of *filles soumises* mandated to attend screenings for STIs.<sup>98</sup> However, a note from September 22, 1944, warned that the commissioner of the *service des mœurs* had informed the central police commissioner that Rochas had, in October of the previous year, “been identified by the ‘Military Police’ for having contaminated an Allied soldier.”<sup>99</sup> The note recommended, “in the interest of public health,” the adoption of “measures included in the regulations of the control of prostitution to prevent Madame Rochas from contaminating other people.”<sup>100</sup> The notice of her arrest from September 18, 1943, recounts an American military police raid of an apartment where women allegedly serviced Allied soldiers.

The man, an American soldier, arrested by Sargent Fontenot of the M.P. (Military Police), declared to have come to this location, advised by comrades habituated to this place, to amuse himself with the women who came here daily. He declared having been received by the person we found in his company and it was [Rochas] who, at the moment of our arrival, was going to grant him her favors.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Renée Rochas à Monsieur Le Préfet d’Alger, July 24, 1944, 91 1K 500, ANOM.

<sup>98</sup> Renée Rochas, “Récepisse,” September 12, 1944, 91 1K 500, ANOM.

<sup>99</sup> “Note pour Monsieur Le Préfet,” September 22, 1944, 91 1K 500, ANOM. *Mme ROCHAS avait été signalée par la ‘military police’ pour avoir contaminé un militaire allié.*

<sup>100</sup> Ibid... *... il serait opportun, dans l’intérêt de la santé Publique de prendre les mesures prévues par les règlements du contrôle de la Prostitution pour empêcher Mme ROCHAS de contaminer d’autres personnes.*

<sup>101</sup> “Rapport d’Arrestation,” September 18, 1943, 91 1K 500, ANOM. *L’homme, un militaire Américain, interpellé par le sergent Fontenot de la M.P. déclare être venu à cet endroit, conseillé par des camarades habitués du lieu, pour s’y amuser avec des femmes qui quotidiennement viennent dans des lieux. Ce soldat déclare avoir été reçu par la personne que nous avons trouvé en sa compagnie et que celle-ci, au moment de notre arrivée, allait lui accorder ses faveurs.*

On the basis of information from the American military police, the *police des mœurs* suggested revoking Rochas's release.

In her letter dated two days before her release from the register, on August 27, 1944, Rochas refuted the conditions of her arrest and the American's accusation underlying it. In a four-page handwritten letter, she asked the prefect to "make all traces of my passage to the *service des mœurs* disappear ... and to be removed from the list of women to surveil."<sup>102</sup> Rochas recalled going to repair her shoe at a hotel owned by her cousin and visiting one Mme Bouchier's restaurant on the day of her arrest.<sup>103</sup> Bouchier, Rochas recounted, had shown Algiers to an American Merchant Marine Officer whom she had previously met in France and had given conversational lessons to two of his "comrades," who had mailed her candies and cigarettes in exchange. "This is the reason why," she said, "seeing an American, I thought he was coming to see this lady, and I let him in. Because I don't speak American, he could give no explanation."<sup>104</sup> She recalled the soldier taking her by the waist and indicating that he wanted to leave, and the two of them went into the hallway before hearing a knock at the door. "I take the liberty of pointing out, *Monsieur le Préfet*, that had I been a woman of ill repute, I would have asked this American for money."<sup>105</sup> By Rochas's account, then, the soldier she had welcomed touched her without speaking to her, gestured to indicate his desire for sex, then, when

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<sup>102</sup> Renée Rochas à Monsieur le Préfet, August 27, 1944, 1, 91 1K 500, ANOM. ... *de faire disparaître toutes traces de mon passage aux services des mœurs ... et à être rayé de la liste des femmes à surveiller.*

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 4. ... *c'est la raison pour laquelle voyant un américain j'ai pressé qu'ils venait voir cette dame et je l'ai laissé entrer ne parlant pas moi-même l'américain nous n'avons pu nous expliquer.*

<sup>105</sup> Ibid. ... *je me permets de mes faire remarquer, Monsieur le Préfet, que si j'avais été une femme de mauvaise vie, je me serais empressé de demander de l'argent à cet Américain.*

the *police des mœurs* appeared, accused her of involvement in the sex trade. The police disputed Rochas's version of events.

While Rochas's case highlights police skepticism of women testifying to misidentification and false arrest, the Ladouze files demonstrate the arduous process of retiring from the list of *filles soumises*. Late in the summer of 1945, Ladouze filed a request for release from the register through an intermediary on grounds that she "absolutely no longer practiced the activity for which she had been registered for moral surveillance."<sup>106</sup> Like Rochas's written appeal to de Gaulle, Ladouze relied on a military advocate in her dealing with the prefect: Mr. Louis M. A. de Boisguéhenneuc, of the Corps des Douair in the small city of Médéa, who solicited an audience with the prefect to plea her case on August 8. On August 27, the prefect forwarded the request to the central commissioner of the *service des mœurs* in Algiers, who forwarded it to the chief doctor of the hygiene center, or *centre de salubrité*, the following day.<sup>107</sup> But the request seems not to have been fully processed, for on September 13, de Boisguéhenneuc wrote the prefect once more, summarizing the information he had shared in their previous meeting on Madame Ladouze's behalf. The request, he explained, was urgent, as her daughter and son-in-law, whom she hoped to protect from shame, were on their way to Algiers.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Mr. Louis M.A. de Boisguéhenneuc, Corps des Douair, Médéa à Monsieur Le Préfet Louis Perillier, Préfet du Département d'Alger, Préfecture d'Alger, Alger, August 8, 1945, 91 1K 500, ANOM ; Mr. Louis M.A. de Boisguéhenneuc, Corps des Douair, Médéa à Monsieur Le Préfet Louis Perillier, Préfet du Département d'Alger, Préfecture d'Alger, Alger, September 13, 1945, 91 1K 500, ANOM. ... *n'exerc[ait] absolument plus la situation pour laquelle elle [avait été] inscrite sur le contrôle des mœurs.*

<sup>107</sup> Mr. Louis M.A. de Boisguéhenneuc à Monsieur Le Préfet Louis Perillier, September 13, 1945, 91 1K 500, ANOM ; Le Préfet d'Alger à Monsieur le Commissaire Central, August 27, 1945, 91 1K 500, ANOM; Monsieur Le Gourierec, Joseph, Commissaire de Police Chargé du Service des Mœurs à Monsieur Le Préfet du Département d'Alger," August 28, 1945, 91 1K 500, ANOM.

<sup>108</sup> Mr. Louis M.A. de Boisguéhenneuc à Monsieur Le Préfet Louis Perillier, September 13, 1945, 91 1K 500, ANOM.

The case he made in this letter contains key insights as to the “type” of woman colonial bureaucrats were willing to release from surveillance: She has a family, she cares for others, she does unpaid care work, and she supports the war effort. De Boisguéhenneuc argues that Ladouze had exited the profession to make a different life. The letter tells the story of a young, single mother, once estranged from her family and now reconciled, with a daughter engaged to a prominent figure in France. He described a caregiver concerned with the old and the orphaned:

She has given proof of the excellent feelings that animate her, in looking after the widowed Mme de Boisguéhenneuc, septuagenarian lacking control of both her thoughts and her actions; in watching over the fate of the young Hervé de Boisguéhenneuc, orphan without father or mother, grandson of the aforementioned, living under the same roof.<sup>109</sup>

The surname de Boisguéhenneuc situates Ladouze’s advocate as kin to the widow and orphan for whom she cared. In addition to portraying her as a caregiver with familial ties, he exempts Ladouze from mercenary interests by insisting that she refused to receive any payment for her work.

“Everything that precedes, done on a volunteer basis,” he recalled, “without any compensation.”<sup>110</sup>

Moreover, to attest to the good character of the old woman she cared for, he cited a similarly philanthropic spirit: “For over thirty years, the widow de Boisguéhenneuc devoted her activity and personal wealth to numerous social causes.”<sup>111</sup> Thus, the widow also upheld the feminine ideal of lifelong and uncompensated care work, in the absence of conventional family ties.

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<sup>109</sup> Mr. Louis M.A. de Boisguéhenneuc à Monsieur Le Préfet Louis Perillier, September 13, 1945, 91 1K 500, ANOM. *Elle a donné la preuve des excellents sentiments qui l’animent, en s’occupant totalement de Mme Vve de Boisguéhenneuc, septuagénaire n’ayant plus le contrôle de ses pensées ni ses actes; en veillant sur le sort du jeune Hervé de Boisguéhenneuc, orphelin de père et de mère, petit fils de la précitée, vivant sous la même toit.*

<sup>110</sup> Ibid. *Tout ce qui précède fait bénévole, ... avec refus de recevoir toute rémunération.*

<sup>111</sup> Ibid. *Depuis plus de 30 années Mme Vve du Boisguéhenneuc consacrait son activité et ses revenus personnels à de nombreuses œuvres social.*

The Allied presence in Algiers makes itself known in de Boisguéhenneuc's testimony that Ladouze's place of work had been requisitioned by the military authority. "Part of the widowed Mme de Boisguéhenneuc's apartment having been requisitioned by the Military Authority," he wrote, "Mme Ladouze oversaw the maintenance of said apartment and saw to it that the interests of the cause were not injured."<sup>112</sup> What was the nature of the requisition? Were soldiers living or working in the apartment in which Madame Ladouze was employed? What sexual advances might she have received from the military personnel living in her employer's home? In addition to managing the household, she was also evidently a diligent record-keeper for the military authority:

She oversaw the filing/classification of all of the archives of Mr. Louis de Boisguéhenneuc, mobilized outside of Algiers, whose press office and *arbitre-rapporteur* and expert had been requisitioned by the Allied authorities.<sup>113</sup>

If the military circumstances open questions about Ladouze's exposure to sexual aggression from occupying soldiers, they also enabled de Boisguéhenneuc to portray Ladouze as supportive of the war effort beyond the realm of sex.

The Rochas and Ladouze cases suggest the competing authority of military and colonial police in overseeing public morality in Algiers. Both women leveraged military authority against the decisions of the *police des mœurs*: Rochas, in requesting to speak with de Gaulle, and Ladouze, in using de Boisguéhenneuc as her intermediary with the colonial bureaucracy. The *police des mœurs* appear, in both cases, as antagonists to their appeals for release. Their recommendations indicate the pressure

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<sup>112</sup> Mr. Louis M.A. de Boisguéhenneuc à Monsieur Le Préfet Louis Perillier, September 13, 1945, 91 1K 500, ANOM. *Une partie de l'appartement de Mme Vve du Boisguéhenneuc ayant été réquisitionnée par l'Autorité Militaire ... Mme Ladouze veilla à l'entretien du dit appartement et à ce que les intérêts en cause ne soient pas lésés.*

<sup>113</sup> Ibid. *Elle veilla au classement de toutes les archives de Mr. Louis de Boisguéhenneuc, mobilisé en dehors d'Alger, dont le Bureau de Presse et d'Arbitre Rapporteur et expert avait été réquisitionné par les Autorités Alliés.*

faced by civil police to shield Allied soldiers from disease. While the occupying forces enabled Rochas's arrest, they provided Ladouze with the opportunity to prove her moral merit. Colonial bureaucrats weighed these representations against the surveillance and the demands of military and civil police agents.

*The Marital Appeal: Marthe Céline Noguier, Antoinette Bosca, and Marie Meyer*

Marthe Céline Noguier's struggle for release from sanitary control lasted almost a year, and predated the Allied invasion. A "Note on the situation of the Coppola couple" attested that Noguier had first applied for release the day after her marriage, on April 29, 1941, to the sailor Emile Coppola. Three months later, she was denied. Her reapplication met silence.<sup>114</sup> Then, in November 1941, she appealed to General Weygand, who served as an intermediary for her second reapplication. By early December, having received no reply, she visited the police commissioner herself. He replied, "Wait, I have nothing to tell you."<sup>115</sup> At the end of that month, she tried and failed once more.<sup>116</sup> Finally, after a note addressed to the secretary-general for the general police called attention to Noguier's sustained efforts, the prefect of Algiers province issued a judgment releasing Noguier from the register of the Algiers hygiene center.<sup>117</sup> The repeated refusals to strike Noguier's name from the sanitary control indicate the *police des mœurs*' skepticism of women seeking removal from their registers. They also

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<sup>114</sup> Note pour Monsieur le Secrétaire Général pour la Police Générale, January 20, 1941, 2, 91 1K 500, ANOM. *Note sur la situation du ménage COPPOLA.*

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 3. *Attendez, rien à vous dire.*

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> "Arrête, Préfecture d'Alger, Inspection Départementale d'Hygiène," March 2, 1942, 91 1K 500, ANOM.



indicate the apparatus of unfreedom underpinning the regulatory regime: to cease to be a *fille soumise*, a woman had to convince an officer with arbitrary power of her moral status.

Noguiet's central claim in favor of release was her marriage. Each of her files opened with a reminder that she had recently married a sailor, and her first attempt at release took place the day after her wedding. The note indicated that Noguiet's husband, Emile Coppola, "had been persuaded that, because of his marriage, his wife would have been released from the *police des mœurs*' medical visit lists."<sup>118</sup> Moreover, the note highlighted Noguiet's registration's detrimental effect on the life of her husband: "The first consequence of this measure was the loss of the job of the husband, to whom was imputed the particular situation of his wife."<sup>119</sup> The final missive directed at the secretary-general for the general police also emphasized Céline Noguiet's new marital status: "The *fille soumise* Celine Noguiet, having married a sailor Emile Coppola ..."<sup>120</sup> It concludes with a hope that the husband, not the wife, be gratified with a response: "Mr. Coppola would be very happy to see this affair quickly resolved. Mr. Prefect would like him to be satisfied."<sup>121</sup> In 1942, the police released Noguiet from sanitary control.<sup>122</sup>

A request filed in 1945 by Marie-Antoinette Bosca, a "former *fille soumise* released from controls," however, led the police to reconsider Noguiet's favorable judgment.<sup>123</sup> On October 5, the

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<sup>118</sup> "Note pour Monsieur le Secrétaire Général pour la Police Générale, " 2, 91 1K 500, ANOM. ... *était persuadé que, du fait de son mariage, sa femme serait radiée des listes de visite médicale de la Police des mœurs.*

<sup>119</sup> Ibid. ... *la conséquence première de cette mesure a été la perte de l'emploi du mari, auquel on a reproché la situation assez particulière de sa femme.*

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 1. *La fille soumise Céline Noguiet, ayant épousé un navigateur Emile COPPOLA ...*

<sup>121</sup> Ibid. *Mr. COPPOLA serait très heureux de voir rapidement solutionner cette affaire. Mr. le Préfet, aimerait qu'il obtienne satisfaction.*

<sup>122</sup> "Arrête, Préfecture d'Alger, Inspection Départementale d'Hygiène," 91 1K 500.

<sup>123</sup> "Note à l'attention de M. Le Commissaire Central (Service Des Mœurs)," October 5, 1945, 91 1K 500, ANOM. ... *ancienne fille soumise rayée des contrôles.*

central commissioner for the *service des mœurs* received a note from the prefect regarding a complaint of Mme Bosca, identified not only as a former *fille soumise* but as a divorcée. She “complains of being newly disturbed by the *police des mœurs* without reason.”<sup>124</sup> The prefect requested “all information relevant to the affair” and the commissioner’s “opinion on what to do next with her.”<sup>125</sup> The case passed between the prefecture, the police commissioner charged with the *service des mœurs*, and the chief doctors of the hygiene centers. The district government, police force, and medical officials all conspired in sharing “information” about Bosca’s “morals” gathered through the regulatory matrix, while she played these departments off of one another to achieve her end: release.

The police commissioner charged with the *service des mœurs* told a story of Antoinette Bosca shot through with moral disdain. He referred to her as a *prostituée* and a *fille soumise* who had presented herself to the service on December 9, 1938, to voluntarily request registration and enrollment in a *maison de tolérance* called “*Les Trois Etoiles*.”<sup>126</sup> She appears to have been a migrant: The registers capture her movements to Médéa, Oran, Mostagenem, and Sétif in Algeria, and across the Mediterranean to Marseille. In August of 1940, Bosca married Nicolas Kataros in El Affroun, where she remained a *fille soumise*. Unlike Emile Coppola, who applied to the government on behalf of his wife’s release, Bosca’s husband reported her to the police when she “left the conjugal home.”<sup>127</sup> Kataros notified the *police des mœurs* on May 12, 1944, and in August, “he warned us that Marie-

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<sup>124</sup> “Note à l’attention de M. Le Commissaire Central (Service Des Mœurs),” 1945, 91 1K 500, ANOM. ... *se plaint d’être de nouveau inquiétée sans raison par le Service des Mœurs.*

<sup>125</sup> Ibid. ... *tous renseignements utiles sur cette affaire ... avis sur la suite à lui réserver.*

<sup>126</sup> Joseph le Gouierec, “Situation de BOSCA Marie Antoinette, femme soumise, inscrite sous le n° 5064,” 1, October 10, 1945, 91 1K 500, ANOM.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid. ... *avait quitté le domicile conjugal.*

Antoinette Bosca still refused to return to her conjugal home, preferring a life of pleasure.”<sup>128</sup> The commissioner reported that Bosca had substituted her connection to Kataros for a friendship with the “*ex-fille soumise*” Marthe Celina Noguier, soliciting clients at a casino called Bar 44.<sup>129</sup>

According to this file, Coppola was not merely Noguier’s concerned husband but a procurer. He and his wife allegedly ran “a suspicious furnished room” called *Les Studios Associés*, “for a time frequented by visiting officers.”<sup>130</sup> Even if the passing soldiers no longer patronized the Coppolas’ establishment, the commissioner insisted that both Noguier and Bosca sustained their engagement in the sex trade well into 1945. “Noguier’s and Marie Antoinette Bosca’s activity never relented,” he wrote; “these two women never stopped their debauchery.”<sup>131</sup> But as of August 1944, to permit Bosca to “redeem herself” by finding work, the police commissioner authorized her to present herself to the hygiene center once a week, rather than twice.<sup>132</sup> “For a period she showed up regularly,” he wrote of her, “then became more rebellious.”<sup>133</sup> Because she no longer submitted to medical screenings, the commissioner had recently doubled Bosca’s required check-ups. If the police commissioner’s penal attitudes did not overshadow the regulations’ medical facade clearly enough, he concluded the letter thus: “In sum, Marie Antoinette Bosca is nothing but a vulgar prostitute who deserves, for the moment, no favorable judgment.”<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Le Gourierec, “Situation de BOSCA Marie Antoinette,” 1, 91 1K 500, ANOM. *Il nous prévenait que BOSCA Marie Antoinette se refusait toujours à rejoindre le domicile conjugal, préférant la vie de plaisirs.*

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid. ... *un meublé suspect ... pendant un certain temps fréquenté par des officiers de passage ...*

<sup>131</sup> Ibid. *L’activité de NOUGUIER et de BOSCA Marie Antoinette ne s’est jamais relâchée ... ces deux femmes n’ont pas cessé de se livrer à la débauche.*

<sup>132</sup> Ibid. ... *se racheter ...*

<sup>133</sup> Ibid. *Durant un certain temps elle se montra assez régulière, puis devint des plus réfractaires.*

<sup>134</sup> Ibid. “Situation de BOSCA Marie Antoinette,” 2, 91 1K 500, ANOM. *En résumé, BOSCA Marie Antoinette, n’est qu’une prostituée vulgaire qui ne mérite pour l’instant, aucune faveur.*

Whether or not Noguier and Bosca engaged in commercial sex is not something a historian can learn from these files. The police commissioner, motivated by concerns for public morality, had official sanction to presume guilt, and his language signals nothing short of disgust. Noguier and Bosca, for their part, might have been representing themselves faithfully, as “reformed” sex workers hoping to build new lives. Or, we might read the stories they told about themselves, through intermediaries and otherwise, as acts of resistance against the surveillance to which the colonial government had subjected them. Close reading the rhetoric deployed on both sides of these disputes illuminates the gender ideology implicitly enforced by the state in distinguishing women in need of surveillance from “respectable” women. That these disputes took place at all signals noteworthy patterns of resistance and refusal to cooperate as well as efforts to go through the necessary channels to be formally reclassified (albeit as a wife rather than as a free woman).

Difficulty distinguishing professional sex workers from unmarried women falsely accused by the police parallels the slippage in the official vocabulary of “*prostitution*” to encompass all facets of women’s marital and non-marital sexual lives. Women repeatedly appealed for release from the registers on the merit of their husbands, testifying to a conflation of singleness, promiscuity, and paid sex. A note from January 26, 1943, for example, includes another clemency request invoking marital status as a claim for release. It was submitted by a husband on behalf of his wife: A “heartbroken” Emile Aubry had written to affirm the “perfect usage” of his wife of five months, a woman described

by the prefect as “*une divorcée ‘légère.’*”<sup>135</sup> If Marie Meyer’s current marriage indicated decency, her past divorce betrayed a “lightness of morals.” The use of such a term in official government documents betrays how callously the police and local bureaucrats regarded women’s intimate lives: a reputation for “lightness” of any kind could make its way into official records as viable grounds to reject a request for release and thus as a “history” that could stymie subsequent requests. Thus, the regulatory apparatus tuned to manage sex work rendered marriage compulsory for social and sexual respect. If this gender ideology proved coercive, so, too, was the registration regime: “The *police des mœurs*,” the prefect explained, “recently carded and subjected her to compulsory medical visits.”<sup>136</sup> That is, the *police des mœurs* had recently licensed the woman against her will.

### *Relèvement*

At times, overzealous police agents thwarted public health officials’ social welfare aims. If Noguier’s and Meyer’s appeals to married life to leave the register highlight the *police des mœurs*’ repressive enforcement of public health law in service of one vision of domestic womanhood, a case from early 1943 hints at tensions within the colonial government weighing penalty against reform. One note from February 23, 1943, indicates confusion within and conflict between local government agencies in Algiers regarding the position of the higher state bureaucracy vis à vis sex work. The departmental

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<sup>135</sup> “Note à Monsieur le Commissaire Central,” January 26, 1943, 91 1K 500, ANOM. *Navré... usage parfaite. Une divorcée légère*: literally, “light, thoughtless”; euphemism for “of loose morals.” *Une femme de mœurs légères* translates to “a loose woman,” a euphemism for a sexually promiscuous woman or a sex worker.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid. *La police des mœurs l’a dernièrement cartée et astreinte à des visites.*

inspector of hygiene addressed the prefect concerning a letter from Dr. Colonieu, chief doctor at the Algiers *centre de salubrité*, on the subject of an attempt at the “*relèvement*” (salvation, recovery, or rescue—that, is the moral reform) of a sex worker. The program had been compromised by an untimely intervention by the *service des mœurs*. He wrote:

I believe it my duty to call your attention to the fact that an unsympathetic application of police regulations, on the part of the agents of the *service des mœurs*, renders every attempt at elevating prostitutes difficult.<sup>137</sup>

By 1943, then, social welfare programs managed by the hygiene department clashed with the violent methods of the *police des mœurs*. The system’s two founding bodies had met at cross purposes.

The inspector urged the *police des mœurs* to step back from intervening in the lives of women undergoing a program of *relèvement*, or preparation to enter “respectable” society. During the period of instruction accompanying all requests for release from sanitary control, he asked the police to have confidence in the *centre de salubrité* overseeing the social welfare program. He insisted that the center would determine whether or not the program had any chance of success and, if not, would issue a warning to the *police des mœurs*.<sup>138</sup> If Noguier struggled to press her release request through the several bureaus of the government of Algiers tasked with policing commercial sex, these files testify that interdepartmental conflicts within the government itself were similarly stalling “social welfare” policies and actions. The discourse of *relèvement* confirms that the government bodies resisting the incursions

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<sup>137</sup> “Note pour monsieur le Préfet: Relèvement des prostituées,” February 23, 1943, 91 1K 500, ANOM. *Je crois devoir appeler votre attention sur le fait qu’une application incompréhensive des règlements de la police, de la part des agents du service des mœurs, rend difficile toute tentative de relèvement des prostituées.*

<sup>138</sup> Ibid. *MME VONCKEN prétend ne plus se livrer à la prostitution et gagner honnêtement sa vie en travaillant.*

of the *police des mœurs* were no less invested in establishing bounds of high and low *mœurs*: they simply hoped to aid some women in reforming themselves.

*The Labor Case: Georgette Voncken*

A fragment of the occupation reappears in the case of Georgette Voncken, who failed to win release in Autumn 1943 partly because she had allegedly sold sexual services to Allied soldiers. On September 24, 1943, the prefect of Algiers wrote the central police commissioner of the provincial town of Blidah concerning the latter's refusal to release Voncken from the lists of *contrôle des mœurs*.<sup>139</sup> According to the prefect, "Mme Voncken claims to no longer give herself over to prostitution and to honestly earn her living by working."<sup>140</sup> The syntax negates prostitution's status as work by framing the woman's new attempts to make an "honest" living working as a break from her former involvement in the sex trade. Folded in the prefect's letter is an instance of employment discrimination: Voncken had complained that the prescribed visits fell during her working hours, causing her "serious harm."<sup>141</sup> The prefect requested information from the central police commissioner to determine whether Mme Voncken's "present behavior" might justify a clemency measure, to aid her *relèvement*.<sup>142</sup> At hand, then, were two considerations: whether the police might

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<sup>139</sup> Le Préfet d'Alger à Monsieur le Commissaire Central de Blidah, September 24, 1943, 91 1K 500, ANOM.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid. *Mme VONCKEN prétend ne plus se livrer à la prostitution et gagner honnêtement sa vie en travaillant.*

<sup>141</sup> Ibid. ... *un grave préjudice ...*

<sup>142</sup> Ibid. ... *conduite actuelle ...*

adjust their surveillance measures to accommodate Voncken's day job, and whether said day job justified some loosening of controls.

On October 4, the chief commissioner of the *service des mœurs* of the city of Blida responded with a different portrait of Georgette Voncken. He summarized her registration from June 2 of that year and confirmed that she had regularly attended her inspections since then. However, he cited her two detentions at the *centre de salubrité* for STIs in August to argue that she had not ceased to engage in commercial sex.<sup>143</sup> The use of women's medical records as evidence against them in their dealings with the *police des mœurs* was, the police records show, common practice. Voncken was one among many women whose positive STI results led not only to two-week detentions but to their long-term retention on the surveillance lists. Indeed, positive tests could block women's exit from the registers long after their release from city dispensaries.

Although the central commissioner conceded that Voncken might work "in a regular enough manner" in the daytime, he remained skeptical that she had ceased to sell sexual services at night.<sup>144</sup> He wrote, "Nonetheless, at night, she gives herself over to prostitution, notably with soldiers from the Allied armies."<sup>145</sup> Indeed, "actual surveillance" demonstrated that both Voncken and her housemate Jeanne Denaerdt, also on the sanitary registers, "never ceased their 'commerce' and, each evening, in their lodgings at 8 Magazine Street, both of them receive Allied soldiers."<sup>146</sup> The scare quotes around

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<sup>143</sup> Le Commissaire Central, Chef de Service à Monsieur le Préfet du Département (Cabinet), "A. S. de Voncken Georgette," 1, October 4, 1943, 91 1K 500, ANOM.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid. ... *d'une façon assez régulière* ...

<sup>145</sup> Ibid. *Il n'en reste pas moins vrai que, la nuit, elle se livre à la prostitution, notamment avec des militaires des armées alliées.*

<sup>146</sup> Ibid. ... *surveillance exercée a démontré que cette femme, qui loge avec la nommé DENAERDT Jeanne, aussi inscrite au contrôle sanitaire, n'a jamais cessé son 'commerce' et, deux reçoivent des soldats alliés.*



“commerce” indicate government attitudes towards commercial sex as less than work. Furthermore, the Commissioner noted a brawl that broke out in the women’s dwelling between an American soldier and a civilian on September 23, in which the former was injured.<sup>147</sup> Voncken’s file sheds further light on the military situation on the ground, in which occupying Allied soldiers moved through the city streets to purchase sex, sometimes tussling with locals.

The commissioner refused any leniency regarding Voncken’s registration, but would not oppose measures to reschedule her visits outside of working hours. The documents indicate that Voncken had presented herself in person to the commissioner to achieve these ends: “This woman, who presented herself today,” he wrote, “told me that she is not requesting an exemption from sanitary visits, but only to schedule them outside of her working hours.”<sup>148</sup> Voncken addressed the commissioner directly to request a more liberal arrangement. Having agreed to such a limited adjustment, the commissioner admitted to the possibility of Voncken’s future release, on the condition that her conduct improved and that “her day job provides her with a sufficient income.”<sup>149</sup> For the time being, however, “she needs to prove that she has definitively retired from debauchery.”<sup>150</sup> If Voncken’s appearance before the commissioner situates her as an active participant in a struggle over her freedom of movement and work, the commissioner’s conclusion confirms that the government officials did not extend the presumption of innocence to women identified by the *police des mœurs* with commercial sex.

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<sup>147</sup> Le Commissaire Central, Chef de Service à Monsieur le Préfet du Département (Cabinet), “A. S. de Voncken Georgette,” 1, 91 1K 500, ANOM.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid. ... *cette femme, qui s’est présentée ce jour, m’a déclaré qu’elle n’entendait pas se soustraire aux visites sanitaires mais qu’elle demandait seulement les subir en dehors de ses heures de travail ...*

<sup>149</sup> Ibid. ... *par son travail, elle puisse justifier de ressources suffisantes ...*

<sup>150</sup> Ibid. .... *lui reste à prouver qu’elle s’est définitivement retirée de la débauche ...*

Ten days after receiving the central commissioner's letter, the prefect of Algiers wrote the departmental inspector of hygiene on her behalf, about her request to submit to medical visits with "a local doctor," as opposed to one at the *centre de salubrité*.<sup>151</sup> He requested a positive response owing to the woman's hope to escape her condition of "misery" through employment and to her manifest desire to retain her job.<sup>152</sup> That very day, he wrote to Voncken himself to inform her that "taking into account your effort to find work and keep it," he had transmitted her request with a favorable opinion to the inspector of hygiene, who would notify her himself of his decision.<sup>153</sup> In the absence of a husband, Voncken's case shows that the freedom of unmarried women accused of sex work depended on their daily wages and on their ability to navigate different jurisdictions and find allies within them. Thus, the system policed women not only into particular marriages but into particular labor relations.

On October 25, the departmental inspector of hygiene notified the prefect that he approved Mme Voncken's request to submit to "mandatory medical visits with a local doctor, indicated by the chief doctor at the *centre de salubrité* in Blida," eliminating any future awkwardness at work regarding inconvenient hours for her sanitary visits.<sup>154</sup> (Note that Voncken did not have the right to select her own doctor: that prerogative rested with the government.) Regarding her request to be removed from the sanitary control list, the inspector refused. He expressed hesitance to disregard the interests of

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<sup>151</sup> Le Préfet d'Alger à Monsieur l'Inspecteur Départemental d'Hygiène, Alger, October 14, 1943, 91 1K 500, ANOM. ... *un médecin de la ville ...*

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> "Lettre à Madame Georgette Voncken," October 15, 1943, 91 1K 500, ANOM. ... *tenant compte de votre effort pour trouver du travail et le conserver ...*

<sup>154</sup> "Note Pour Monsieur Le Préfet d'Alger, Cabinet, A/S de MME VONCKEN Georgette" October 25, 1943, 91 1K 500, ANOM. ... *visites médicales réglementaires chez un médecin de la ville, désigné par le Médecin Chef du Centre de Salubrité de Blida.*

“public health” by refuting the conclusion of the central police commissioner of Blida’s report from October 4, which confirmed that Georgette Voncken had not ceased to engage in commercial sex. Instead, he recommended heightened surveillance measures be taken against Mme Voncken, to observe her every attempt “to exit her current situation.”<sup>155</sup> He also requested notification regarding any eventual and durable change in conduct that might give reason to release her from *contrôle sanitaire des mœurs*.<sup>156</sup> Attempts to exit government registers could thus result in an even tighter regulatory grip, as officials condoned new forms of surveillance to observe women’s progress out of the trade.

#### *Internal Tensions: Marguerite Tomasi*

The case of one Marguerite Tomasi offers a unique example of a woman’s legal altercations with colonial administrators, and of how accusations of “debauchery” entangled with tenancy disputes. On June 6, 1945, the registry of the Commercial Court at Algiers heard seven testimonies from Tomasi’s neighbors, clients, and employees as to an accusation, levied by her landlord, that her tobacco shop doubled as a “meet-up spot” for commercial sex.<sup>157</sup> A decree from March 10 had declared her tobacco shop a “*lieu de débauche*,” or “place of vice,” and one from April 18 had subjected her to *contrôle sanitaire*.<sup>158</sup> All seven individuals testified to her innocence. Her neighbor Alphonse Boyer had “never

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<sup>155</sup> “Note Pour Monsieur Le Préfet d’Alger, Cabinet,” 91 1K 500, ANOM. ... *pour sortir de sa situation actuelle ...*

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Marguerite Tomasi à Monsieur Le Préfet du Département d’Alger, September 25, 1945, 1–2, 91 1K 500, ANOM.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 1.

seen Madame Tomasi in dubious or untidy clothes.”<sup>159</sup> Her neighbor Vives Lucie entrusted Tomasi with the care of her son, having “never seen Madame Tomasi exercise the sad job of which she is accused.”<sup>160</sup> Alfred Zermati would never have sent his 21-year-old daughter to buy tobacco at Tomasi’s shop “if it were a *lieu de débauche*,” and Henriette Seigliani insisted that Tomasi “leads a laborious, serious, and hard-working life.”<sup>161</sup> Renée Roche “estimates that Madame Tomasi is of perfect honorability.”<sup>162</sup> On July 18, the Commercial Court declared her innocence.<sup>163</sup>

On September 25, 1945, Tomasi wrote the prefect of Algiers province personally to defend herself. Tomasi told the story of repeated police inquests and harassment, despite the decision of the court.<sup>164</sup> She demonstrated remarkable legal knowledge of the system of regulations to which she was liable. Tomasi reminded the prefect that with each inquest,

the judges were obliged each time to admit that [the accusation] was ill-founded. They were entitled to do so since the Court of Cassation, Our Supreme Court, decided that the automatic registration of a person on the register of *filles soumises* is only a simple presumption and allows the latter to prove that she is not a prostitute.<sup>165</sup>

Tomasi attached a copy of the November 23, 1944, judgment of the Correctional Tribunal releasing her from surveillance, a copy of the verbal process for the June 6, 1945 investigation including the

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<sup>159</sup> “Extrait Des Minutes de Geffe Du Tribunal de Commerce d’Alger, Département d’Alger,” June 6, 1945, 1, 91 1K 500, ANOM. *Je n’ai jamais vu madame TOMASI dans une tenue douteuse ou désordonnée.*

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 2. *Je n’ai jamais vu Madame TOMASI exercer le triste métier qu’en lui reproche.*

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 3. *Je n’y aurais jamais d’ailleurs envoyé ma demoiselle âgée de vingt et un ans, si le magasin de Madame Tomasi était un lieu de débauche ... mène une vie laborieuse, sérieuse, et travailleuse.*

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 4. *J’estime que Madame Tomasi est d’une parfaite honorabilité.*

<sup>163</sup> Marguerite Tomasi à Monsieur Le Préfet du Département d’Alger, September 25, 1945, 2, 91 1K 500, ANOM.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 6. *Il résulte de ces procédures que lorsque j’ai pu me défendre contre l’accusation de prostitution qui a été portée contre moi, les Juges ont été obligés chaque fois de convenir, qu’elle était mal fondée. Ils étaient en droit de le faire puisque la Cour de Cassation, Notre Juridiction Suprême, décidé que l’inscription d’office d’une personne sur le registre des filles publiques, n’est qu’une simple présomption et permet à cette dernière de prouver qu’elle n’est pas une prostituée.*

seven testimonies in her defense, and a letter from the public prosecutor at the Court of Saint-Omer, France, authorizing her to reopen the drinking establishment she had abandoned to take refuge in Algeria in the face of the German occupation of France.<sup>166</sup> Tomasi hoped to “wash myself of this mark of infamy” before her projected return to the metropole. She concluded with an appeal to the prefect’s “sentiments of humanity” and a final rebuke of the system of sanitary controls: “The sole item that prevents me” she wrote, “is that I am currently considered, after your decree, to be a registered prostitute.”<sup>167</sup>

Tomasi’s reference to her status as a refugee from mainland France speak to the position of settler power to which she could appeal. Although she lacked political rights as a woman, her familiarity with legal processes bespeaks a certain understanding of what leverage she could exercise in negotiating with the government. But the remainder of her file reveals tension within the administrative apparatus over the nature of her appeal. A memo to the director of the prefect’s cabinet from the departmental inspector of hygiene said, “for this person, who was a refugee, to return to France to resume business, a measure of release from *contrôle sanitaire* for prostitution could be taken,” assuming her serological exams from the Algiers *centre de salubrité* returned negative.<sup>168</sup> An internal memo, forwarded to the departmental inspector of hygiene, indicated sympathy among officials who applied to the *service des mœurs* for more information on Tomasi, “who appears to have

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<sup>166</sup> Marguerite Tomasi à Monsieur Le Préfet du Département d’Alger, September 25, 1945, 6, 91 1K 500, ANOM.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 7. *Le seule chose qui m’en empêche, c’est que je suis actuellement considérée à la suite de votre arrêté comme une fille en carte.*

<sup>168</sup> “Note à Monsieur Le Directeur Du Cabinet de M. Le Préfet,” October 6, 1945, 91 1K 500, ANOM. ... *qu’afin de cette personne qui était réfugiée, puisse repartir en France reprendre l’exploitation de son commerce, une mesure de radiation du contrôle sanitaire de la prostitution pourrait être prise en sa faveur sous réserve toutefois que les examens sérologiques qui me seront communiqués par Mme le Médecin-chef du Centre de Salubrité d’Alger se révèlent négatifs.*

been the object of nasty remark.”<sup>169</sup> The public health branch of the government was more willing to entertain Tomasi’s request.

The police commissioner charged with the *service des mœurs*, however, disagreed with this recommendation. “The registration of the interested party on *contrôles sanitaires* was not decided, by my request, but after very tight surveillance to which this person was subjected for long months,” he wrote. With his letter, the commissioner attached “voluminous files that constitute, independently from declarations made spontaneously by the neighbors and inhabitants of the *quartier*, the sincere and precise results of the surveillance that I have exercised.” He thus offered the information collected by officers of the police service to counteract the oral testimonies offered by the woman’s neighbors, and the written defense submitted by herself:

These files indisputably establish that Madame Tomasi has been notoriously and openly engaged in debauchery for a very long time ... and, on the other hand, that her usual behavior in the building she lived in was, for all her neighbors, an object of scandal and public outrage that compelled me to sue before the competent courts.<sup>170</sup>

The police commissioner’s ad hoc intelligence thus contradicted the official record of Tomasi’s good behavior. He refused to accede to the narratives of migration, hard work, and familial trust to which she and her neighbors rhetorically appealed. The case unseals a system founded on suspicion and rife with internal disagreements over the nature of an accused woman’s word.

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<sup>169</sup> “Note à Monsieur Le Commissaire Central Service Des Mœurs,” October 13, 1945, 91 1K 500, ANOM. ... *qui semble avoir été l’objet de méchancetés.*

<sup>170</sup> Monsieur Le Gourierec Joseph, Commissaire de Police, Chargé du Service des Mœurs, à Monsieur Le Préfet Du Département d’Alger, October 15, 1945, 91 1K 500, ANOM. *Ces dossiers établissent indiscutablement que madame TOMASI se livre notoirement et ouvertement depuis très longtemps à la débauche, qu’elle reconnaît elle-même ainsi que les femmes qu’elle a engagés à l’imiter et d’autre part, que ses comportements habituels dans l’immeuble qu’elle habitait étaient pour tous ses voisins, un objet de scandale et d’outrage public qui m’a contraint à déférer devant les tribunaux compétents.*

*Tenancy Troubles: Mebarka bent Ahmed Ladjabi*

Algerian women appear but scarcely in this archive because of the state of rightlessness in which they lived. All of the requests filed with the colonial administration were written in formal French, sometimes through European male intermediaries. The settler women who applied for release must have had access to knowledge of the institutions governing them and expectations regarding their political and social rights. Algerian women were excluded from all of these protections. One rare set of documents, however, includes a letter from Mebarka bent Ahmed Ladjabi addressed to the Prefect of Algiers on June 25, 1945, complaining of a false arrest.<sup>171</sup> Ladjabi, who lived in the casbah, had worked as a domestic servant for the lawyer Marcel Saïr for six years, and as a nurse for his child for two. (“One does not entrust their child to a woman of ill repute,” Ladjabi wrote.)<sup>172</sup> She had previously been under the employ of two other men, Mr. Cherqui and Dr. Boutin, both of whom she supplied as references.<sup>173</sup> To combat the power of her landlord, who sought to exploit her for profit, Ladjabi invoked these formal labor relationships to condemn her hasty registration by police. Her story indicates the structures of coercion built into the regulatory regime, in particular in racialized and impoverished spaces like the casbah.

Ladjabi’s narration contradicts official colonial narratives regarding sex work among Algerian women. In her self-defense, she wrote that, one year before,

The concierge of my building (21 Casbah Street) who favored the prostitution of numerous *mauresques*, not only in her house, but in the neighborhood, reproached me, as the Allied soldiers were an inexhaustible source of income, for not wanting to prostitute myself, under her

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<sup>171</sup> Mebarka Bent Ahmed Ladjabi à Monsieur Le Préfet, June 28, 1945, 1, 91 1K 500, ANOM.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 2. *On ne confie pas un enfant à une femme de mauvaise vie.*

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

cover. And thinking to draw me into her views, she reported to the *service des mœurs* that a *fille soumise* who was simply “a friend” of mine was frequenting my apartment. During a raid, I was therefore taken away, at the same time as my friend, then immediately given a card and required to undergo health examinations “—WHILE NO ACT OF PROSTITUTION” was ever found against me.<sup>174</sup>

Ladjabi’s “conciierge” demonstrates how tenancy disputes put women in positions of disempowerment relative to their landlords, who could recruit them into the sex market using the mechanisms of colonial law. The source of income from Allied soldiers the *conciierge* used as leverage with Ladjabi portrays the Allied occupation as a source of pressure on the sex market and confirms that the *casbah* ban did not keep Allied soldiers from frequenting what their officials termed “native brothels.” The mention of a “raid” and the rapidity of her arrest, in contrast to the lengthy processes indicated by the settler women, speak to the racist exercise of police power. The assumption that Ladjabi and her friend should both be given registration cards without proof of an actual act of commercial sex suggests the colonial logics that cast all Algerian women as potential *clandestines*. Ladjabi’s fury erupts in the all-capitalized styling of her final line, amidst a two-page rebuke of the registration practices in perfect formal French. One month later, Ladjabi received a note from the Prefect notifying her that, as of July 12, she had been released from *contrôle sanitaire*.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> Mebarka Bent Ahmed Ladjabi à Monsieur Le Préfet, 1, 91 1K 500, ANOM. *La conciierge de mon immeuble (21 rue de la Casbah) qui favorisait la prostitution de nombreuse mauresques, non seulement dans sa maison, mais dans le quartier, me reprocha alors que les soldats alliés étaient une source intarissable de revenus, de ne pas vouloir me prostituer, sous son couvert. Et pensant m’entraîner dans ses vues, elle signale au Service des Mœurs (Police d’Etat) qu’une fille soumise qui était simplement pour moi ‘une amie,’ fréquentait mon appartement. Au cours d’une descente, je fus donc emmenée, en même temps que mon amie, puis immédiatement mise en carte et astreinte à la visite sanitaire » —ALORS QU’AUCUN FAIT DE PROSTITUTION, » n’ai jamais été constaté à mon rencontre.*

<sup>175</sup> Le Préfet à Madame Ladjabi Mebarka Bent Ahmed, July 28, 1945, 91 1K 500, ANOM.



Each of these case files reveals a different facet of the arbitrary power exercised by colonial officials in Algeria to surveil and delimit the lives of women identified by the police as sex workers. They also indicate the different narrative strategies to which women had recourse to negotiate the conditions of their lives under the sanitary intelligence-gathering regime. These women strategized to maximize their outcomes across different government bodies by appealing to officials they believed would sympathize. Across the documents, the police appear as antagonistic to this endeavor. The ensuing internal conflicts within the government indicate the tension between the more draconian police service and a series of administrative and medical bodies more likely to respond to appeals to their “humanity” or to engage in efforts at *relèvement*. Finally, because the social and institutional protections to which the European women appealed were largely reserved for citizens, the negotiations represented in the release requests demonstrate how settler women leveraged their relative positions of colonial freedom and gendered unfreedom to survive.

### Chapter Three

#### “Free Consent, More or Less”: A System Sustained

##### *The Medical Aftermath*

The release requests betray power struggles within the colonial government over the public health regime’s punitive and productive functions. The women whose fragments appear in this archive voiced, in their way, their hostility towards the *police des mœurs*. Meanwhile, the authority of doctors and public health officials received a boost from a medical development that would shift the horizons of state-secured sexual health: the widespread use of penicillin. The drug was developed so rapidly in part because the American military supported medical research that could aid in “the recovery of manpower.”<sup>176</sup> Five months before Alexander Fleming published his paper on the use of penicillin to cure meningitis in October 1943, the British War Cabinet had already formed the Penicillin Committee, aimed at promoting the mass production of the drug and facilitating resource-sharing with the Americans, whose Office of Scientific Research and Development had been coordinating penicillin research for some time.<sup>177</sup>

The stores of penicillin developed through the Allied military research incubator reserved to treat war wounds went first to North Africa, to support the Allied campaign.<sup>178</sup> A month after the

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<sup>176</sup> Roswell Quinn, “Rethinking Antibiotic Research and Development: World War II and the Penicillin Collaborative,” *American Journal of Public Health* 103, no. 3 (March 2013): 427, <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2012.300693>.

<sup>177</sup> Alexander Fleming, “STREPTOCOCCAL MENINGITIS TREATED WITH PENICILLIN.: MEASUREMENT OF BACTERIOSTATIC POWER OF BLOOD AND CEREBROSPINAL FLUID,” *The Lancet*, Originally published as Volume 2, Issue 6267, 242, no. 6267 (October 9, 1943): 434, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(00\)87452-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(00)87452-8); V. D. Allison, “Personal Recollections of Sir Almroth Wright and Sir Alexander Fleming,” *The Ulster Medical Journal* 43, no. 2 (1974): 95; Quinn, “Rethinking Antibiotic Research and Development,” 427–8.

<sup>178</sup> Allison, “Personal Recollections of Sir Almroth Wright and Sir Alexander Fleming,” 95.

formation of the Penicillin Committee, in May 1943, an outbreak of gonorrhoea among troops preparing to invade Sicily from North Africa had provoked military doctors to wonder whether penicillin could be used to treat the disease.<sup>179</sup> In North Africa, the sense of urgency rose as increasing numbers of soldiers who might have been training for the assault remained out of combat for highly inefficient treatment with permanganate douches.<sup>180</sup> Because supplies of penicillin were low and highly regulated, the decision to use the drug to treat sexually transmitted infections rather than the injuries of men wounded on the front caused consternation among military authorities. Decades after the war, British Army pathologist James Howie recounted his involvement in the debate among British military authorities over whether to repurpose stores of the drug, then in short supply and reserved for treating infected war wounds, for STI treatment. A marginal note written in Churchill's telltale green ink on the relevant memorandum, Howie wrote, indicated the prime minister's cryptic blessing: "It must be used to the best military advantage."<sup>181</sup> By this point in the war, sex work in North Africa had risen to the level of a national security threat in the eyes of Allied military command.

Despite Churchill's call, medical treatment for Allied soldiers with STIs retained the flavor of a potential scandal among the American military's medical authorities. A phone call transcript from June 23, 1943, between United States Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau and Chair of the War Manpower Commission Paul McNutt is stippled with em-dashes and ellipses around the topic of sexually transmitted infections. Morgenthau brought up the perfection of the "five-day drip method"

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<sup>179</sup> James Howie, "Gonorrhoea—A Question of Tactics.," *British Medical Journal* 2, no. 6205 (December 22, 1979): 1631.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*

for treating STIs and hoped McNutt could ensure the Army implemented the technique in North Africa. “Of course, what I’ve been urging the Army to do is to take these people, cure them, make them ready for active service,” McNutt said. “They’ve resisted all the way along on venereals.”<sup>182</sup> McNutt indicated that the surgeon general of the army had incorporated the treatment method but resisted directives to accept infected American soldiers into his treatment facilities.<sup>183</sup> “There’s no reason for these men to be running around here loose when they can be cured and can be used and will help us in our problem of getting sufficient number of able bodied men for the armed forces,” McNutt said.<sup>184</sup> Morgenthau agreed to draft a memo on the problem and both men resolved to attempt, once more, to convince the surgeon general to abandon what appears to have been his moral reservations at treating men who had contracted STIs using this more rapid method. As McNutt’s title suggests, this was a matter of “manpower.”

Allied medical personnel’s reflexes to prioritize men wounded in combat over those infected *in delicto* contrasted with some military authorities’ incorporation of penicillin into their strategies to manage soldiers’ sexual health on the ground. For example, in an oral history with the World War II Museum recorded in 2015, a former lieutenant of the 39<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment stationed in an oasis twenty miles south of Sidi bel Abbès recalled the army’s use of penicillin to address “the time we became combat inefficient due to venereal disease.”<sup>185</sup> In May 1943, Charles Scheffel recounted, the

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<sup>182</sup> Paul McNutt and Henry Morgenthau, Phone Transcript, June 23, 1943, Henry Morgenthau, Jr. Papers, Diaries of Henry Morgenthau, Jr., Volume 644, June 22 – June 24, 1943, National Archives and Records Administration, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/28277289>.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>185</sup> *Scheffel, Charles (Segment 8)*, The Digital Collections of the National WWII Museum: Oral Histories (New Orleans, 2015), <https://www.ww2online.org/view/charles-scheffel#segment-8>; Thomas Gibbs, “Venereal Disease and American

colonel received news of a shipment of the newly discovered “miracle medicine” at the port in Oran, which could be used to treat STIs. Scheffel recalled being summoned, alongside a medical officer, by Colonel William Ritter, who instructed Scheffel to collect \$200 from each company in the regiment, “go into Sidi-bel-Abbès, and rent us the best whorehouse in town.” With \$5,000 in a bag, Scheffel recalled driving in a Jeep to the brothel reserved for officers of the French Foreign Legion, which was headquartered in the town. Each of the *maison*’s one hundred *filles soumises* received a shot of penicillin, and Scheffel recalled drawing straws to apportion out one hundred brothel passes—red numbered tickets he had prepared himself—among the four hundred men.<sup>186</sup>

The month-long operation authorized the fantasies of sexual excess in North Africa and French tolerance thereof that rationalized American military policies to facilitate paid sex. “Well, believe me, prostitution was legal in France,” Scheffel said, by way of explaining the high STI rates among his regiment, “and it was in Morocco and Algeria, the provinces of France. So there must have been ten or fifteen thousand prostitutes there in Algiers, in Sidi-bel-Abbès.”<sup>187</sup> His loose vocabulary—conflating Algiers, presumably Algeria, and Sidi-bel-Abbès, estimating numbers of sex workers far beyond even the most generous clandestine estimations by French officials in Algiers, let alone for a town of 40- to 50,000—bespeaks the cultural ignorance and sexual license brought by the Americans to North African shores. After they left, colonial bureaucrats struggled to regain control of a system in chaos.

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Policy in a Foreign War Zone: 39th Infantry Regiment in Sidi-Bel-Abbes, Algeria. May of 1943.” (University of New Orleans, 2015), 25, <https://scholarworks.uno.edu/td/2076>.

<sup>186</sup> Scheffel, *Charles (Segment 8)*.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

*Postwar Politics*

“The immorality resulting from the war and the very difficult living conditions,” the minister of the interior wrote to the prefect of police and the prefects in Algeria, from Paris, on March 5, 1945, “considerably increased the number of women who give themselves to prostitution and who escape all control.”<sup>188</sup> Colonial bureaucrats struggled to reassert authority over a postwar urban sex market overrun, they believed, with *clandestines* responding to the surge in demand from the occupiers. And indeed, according to Colonieu’s statistics, the numbers were higher during wartime: The year 1946 showed the highest number of *filles soumises* on record at seven hundred—one hundred new registrations since the last count, in 1942.<sup>189</sup> In 1946, the chief doctor of the Algiers hygiene center reported treating 650 *filles soumises* and 393 *clandestines* for sexually transmitted infections in that city alone;<sup>190</sup> three years later, these figures would fall to 548 and 304, respectively.<sup>191</sup> Now, however, the medical profession in Algeria was armed with a new claim to authority: penicillin.

French colonial doctors had quickly incorporated the drug into their treatment protocols in hygiene centers for sex workers after it became more widely available. French research and development had lagged during the war: by its conclusion, scientists at the Pasteur Institute had

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<sup>188</sup> Le Ministre de l’Intérieur à Monsieur Le Préfet de Police et Messieurs Les Préfets, “Repression de La Prostitution Clandestine,” March 5, 1945, 912 113, Sous-préfecture de Médéa (1856–1961), Domaines de compétence de la sous-préfecture, Santé, Hygiène publique et épidémies, La lutte antivénérienne : circulaires, rapport, ANOM. *L’immoralité résultant de la guerre et des conditions d’existence très difficiles ont accru considérablement le nombre de femmes qui se livrent à la prostitution et qui échappent à tout contrôle.*

<sup>189</sup> Maurice Le Poil, “faut-il abolir la prostitution ?” 45, as cited in Taraud, 67.

<sup>190</sup> Le Docteur L. Colonieu, Médecin-Chef du Centre de Salubrité d’Alger à Monsieur le Préfet, “Rapport sur le fonctionnement du Centre de Salubrité pendant l’année 1946,” March 20, 1947, GGA 4U 56, Gouvernement Général de l’Algérie, Série 4, Sous-Série U, Boîte 56, ANOM.

<sup>191</sup> L. Colonieu, “Rapport sur le fonctionnement du Centre de Salubrité d’Alger pendant l’année 1949,” *Cahiers Médicaux de l’Union Française : Revue médico-chirurgicale de La France d’outre-mer* 5, no. 38 (1950): 213.

produced enough penicillin from Fleming's strain to treat no more than thirty patients of their own.<sup>192</sup>

"We continued as much as we could. Of course, our work was partly diverted" during the German occupation of France, the Institute's president, Jacques Tréfouël, told the American Office of War:

"vast amounts of time and energy were lost."<sup>193</sup> However, as the drug became more widely available in the years after the war, penicillin became an "emblem of scientific advance and national recovery."<sup>194</sup>

As early as 1946, the chief doctor of the Algiers hygiene center reported that he was treating gonorrhea in sex workers with penicillin, with a 96-percent rate of success.<sup>195</sup> With an administrative infrastructure strained by occupation and colonial authority jeopardized by metropolitan defeat, doctors became key players in the struggle to regain sanitary control.

It was not obvious that state regulation of sex work would survive as a viable strategy to do this: In metropolitan France, the regulationist approach had reached a breaking point after the war. Efforts to reconstruct French and French colonial society had changed the atmosphere around the government's involvement in the sexual lives of its citizens and subjects. The wave of nationalization measures passed in 1945 coincided with the Resistance movement's vision to centralize public health law, under which "special networks of dispensaries for targeted populations" other than sex workers opened for the first time.<sup>196</sup> Moreover, French women emerged as political subjects in 1944, when de

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<sup>192</sup> Robert Gaynes, "The Discovery of Penicillin—New Insights After More Than 75 Years of Clinical Use," *Emerging Infectious Diseases* 23, no. 5 (May 2017): 851, <https://doi.org/10.3201/eid2305.161556>.

<sup>193</sup> Jacques Tréfouël, *Entretien pour l'office d'information de guerre*, 28 Jan. 1945, transcript, DIR OFF 1, Archives de l'Institut Pasteur, Paris, as cited in Jean-Paul Gaudillière and Bernd Gausemeier, "Molding National Research Systems: The Introduction of Penicillin to Germany and France," *Osiris* 20 (2005): 183.

<sup>194</sup> Gaudillière and Gausemeier, 186.

<sup>195</sup> Le Docteur L. Colonieu, Médecin-Chef du Centre de Salubrité d'Alger à Monsieur le Préfet, "Rapport sur le fonctionnement du Centre de Salubrité pendant l'année 1946," 3, GGA 4U 56, ANOM.

<sup>196</sup> Gaudillière and Gausemeier, 183.

Gaule announced the women's vote in April from the Committee of National Liberation's headquarters in Algiers.<sup>197</sup> (Algerian women would not win the right to vote for another fourteen years.)<sup>198</sup> After the first elections in which women cast ballots, in 1946, the metropolitan licensing regime toppled with *la loi du 13 avril*, which forbade all *maisons de tolérance* throughout the national territory of France.<sup>199</sup> The ban responded, in part, to public perceptions of licensed brothels as sites of pro-German collaboration during the occupation, after the Reich requisitioned Parisian *maisons* and jointly managed personnel files with the French Bureau of Hygiene and Police.<sup>200</sup>

Meanwhile, African leaders were placing on French government officials to redefine the terms of the empire after the war, which would have challenged the authority of a system as arbitrary and invasive as the set of sanitary controls.<sup>201</sup> At this time, Algerians held the legal status of “*indigènes*”: they were French subjects but not citizens, and thus lacked the rights and protections afforded European settlers.<sup>202</sup> In 1944, *l'indigénat*, or “native code,” which institutionalized the legal inferiority of indigenous people under French imperial rule, came under threat for the first time. In March of that year, the CFLN extended citizenship to 65,000 “*français musulmans d'Algérie*.”<sup>203</sup> After months of heated debate, the 1946 Constitution of the Fourth Republic reformulated the French Empire as the

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<sup>197</sup> Hause, *Women's Suffrage and Social Politics in the French Third Republic*, 251.

<sup>198</sup> Alf Andrew Heggoy, “Algerian Women and the Right to Vote: Some Colonial Anomalies,” *The Muslim World* 64, no. 3 (1974): 208, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1478-1913.1974.tb03160.x>.

<sup>199</sup> Félix Gouin et al., “Loi N° 46-685 Du 13 Avril 1946 Tendante à La Fermeture Des Maisons de Tolérance et Au Renforcement de La Lutte Contre Le Proxénétisme.,” *Journal Officiel de La République Française : Lois et Décrets*, no. 89 (April 14, 1946): 3138–39, GGA 4U 54, ANOM.

<sup>200</sup> Corbin, *Les Filles de Noce*, 503–4.

<sup>201</sup> Frederick Cooper, *Citizenship between Empire and Nation: Remaking France and French Africa, 1945-1960* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2014), 126.

<sup>202</sup> Laure Blévis, “Quelle citoyenneté pour les Algériens ?” in *Histoire de l'Algérie à la période coloniale*, Poche / Essais (Paris: La Découverte, 2014), 352, <https://doi.org/10.3917/dec.bouch.2013.01.0352>.

<sup>203</sup> Bouchène et al., “Chronologie.”



French Union, a body guided—at least in principle—by the resolution that “France shall form with its overseas peoples a Union founded upon equal rights and duties, without distinction of race or religion.”<sup>204</sup> When the Constitution was passed, the hard-won and controversial citizenship clauses left the Algerian people’s colonial future uncertain.<sup>205</sup> Articles 80 to 82 raised new questions of citizenship for colonial subjects; Algerians, for their part, would have “the quality of French citizens” but were not explicitly citizens of the Republic.<sup>206</sup> The final line of the preamble promises a new French Republic “eschewing all systems of colonisation founded upon arbitrary rule.”<sup>207</sup>

These postwar legal reforms required the colonial bureaucracy more broadly to refashion itself as a benevolent force in the lives of both women and Algerians, whose varying degrees of rightlessness were newly up for debate. Although the constitutional reforms maintained the prominence of France as a “guiding force,” the Union introduced new interest in the consent of the governed to imperial rule. In this atmosphere, the system of regulations could not continue as they had before, predicated as they were on the arbitrary exercise of police force against women—settler women, who could not vote, and Algerian women, who were legally inferior as *indigènes*. As leaders of the reconfigured French Union eliminated the empire’s most heinous aspects to extend its life as a refashioned force of benevolence, the regulators of the Algerian sex market concocted new justifications to sustain the system in the postwar political climate. Indeed, when the regulations toppled in metropolitan France, colonial leadership in Algeria overwhelmingly refused to apply the law “overseas.”

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<sup>204</sup> Preamble to the Constitution of 27 October 1946. <https://www.elysee.fr/en/french-presidency/the-constitution-of-27-october-1946>.

<sup>205</sup> Cooper, *Citizenship between Empire and Nation*, 124.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>207</sup> Preamble to the Constitution of 27 October 1946.

*The Reformists*

Under new pressure in the postwar atmosphere and determined to salvage a regime disorganized by occupation and defeat, the colonial administration circulated memoranda collecting the opinions of various officials regarding the future of state licensing powers in Algeria. Bureaucrats and doctors committed to extending sanitary control deployed a series of narratives using public welfare as a justification to maintain the colonial status quo. Lucien Colonieu, the chief doctor of the Algiers *centre de salubrité*, for example, used the region's inadequate social services for women exiting the sex trade as justification not to close the *maisons de tolérance* or terminate mandatory inspections. He wrote the prefect of Algiers in March 1947: "Wisdom dictates that nothing should be changed in the current regulations" without first implementing a series of "social devices," from medical triage centers to "rural recovery colonies" for reformed sex workers.<sup>208</sup> Underdevelopment of public welfare infrastructure in Algeria thus both symptomized its past and guaranteed its future colonial status.

Officials also cited colonial fantasies of sexual difference undergirding French rule to explain why the Algerian sex market could not go unregulated. The director of reforms wrote the director of health and the family in April 1947 warning that if the closure of the *maisons de tolérance* were interpreted, in Algeria, to extend to the *quartiers réservés* out of which Algerian sex workers largely worked, the effects would be disastrous. Although these women sold sex outside of licensed brothels as

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<sup>208</sup> Le Docteur L. Colonieu, Médecin-Chef du Centre de Salubrité d'Alger à Monsieur le Préfet, "Rapport sur le fonctionnement du Centre de Salubrité pendant l'année 1946," 5–6, GGA 4U 56, ANOM. *Aussi la sagesse voudrait que l'on ne change rien aux règlements actuels sans avoir prévu pour le département: Un centre de triage médical - un centre psychotechnique d'orientation - une colonie rurale de relèvement - des homes de semi-liberté - des foyers et centres d'accueil. Quand ce dispositif social sera en place, on pourra seulement envisager pour l'Algérie l'application de la législation de la métropole.*

individuals, the director wrote, under the regulations, they remained subject to “severe medical controls.”<sup>209</sup> However, “it is quite certain that if the residents of these quarters were expelled from them for engaging in free prostitution, their medical supervision would become impossible, despite all the medico-social measures that could be enacted.”<sup>210</sup> In this case, settler-colonial urban development justified the continuation of the regime: The director cited large cities like Algiers with large populations of ghettoized Algerians as of particular concern.

Others cited the inadequacy of colonial public health infrastructure as an impediment to the closure of the brothels. The Central Algerian Commission for Venereal Diseases insisted that Algeria would not be ready to abolish the regime until its medical infrastructure was improved. The Department of Health and Hygiene notified the minister of the interior in September 1947 that the commission had determined at a meeting in March

that it was essential (before considering the application of the provisions of the law of April 13, 1946, relating to the closing of brothels) to put the Algerian medical profession in a position to fight against venereal diseases with weapons legally equivalent to those available to practitioners in the Metropolis.<sup>211</sup>

The Department of Public Health and the Family officially endorsed this position in a note to the director of the cabinet of the ambassador to France in November. According to his note, in light of

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<sup>209</sup> “Note Pour Monsieur le Directeur de la Santé et de la Famille, Objet : Lutte antivénéérienne, Lois des 13 et 24 Avril 1946 sur le contrôle et la répression de la prostitution,” April 16, 1947, GGA 4U 56, ANOM. ... *se livrent à leur commerce à titre individuel tout en demeurant soumises à un contrôle médical sévère.*

<sup>210</sup> Ibid. *Il est bien certain que si les pensionnaires de ces quartiers en étaient expulsées pour se livrer à la prostitution libre, leur surveillance médicale deviendrait impossible, en dépit de toutes les mesures d’ordre médico-social qui pourraient être édictées.*

<sup>211</sup> L’Ambassadeur de France, le Gouverneur Général de l’Algérie, à Monsieur le Ministre de l’Intérieur, “Objet : Prophylaxie des maladies vénériennes,” September 1, 1947, GGU 4U 56, ANOM. ... *qu’il était indispensable (avant de songer à l’application des dispositions de la loi du 13 Avril 1946 relatives à la fermeture des maisons de tolérance) de mettre le corps médical algérien en mesure de lutter contre les maladies vénériennes avec des armes juridiquement équivalentes à celles dont disposent les praticiens de la Métropole.*

“insufficient number of laboratories and specialized prophylactic centers” in Algeria, the application of the law “appears premature and could present disadvantages regarding the protection of public health.”<sup>212</sup> Rather than the abolition of compulsory examinations and police registration, these bureaucrats suggested the widespread expansion of *la lutte*. This promise pushed the abolition of the licensing regime to an indeterminate point in Algeria’s colonial future.

Doctors Raynaud and Colonieu made a public case against the extension of the licensed brothel ban to Algeria, in part, using public health and social hygiene rhetoric that had underwritten the settler colonial project since its inception. In the report they presented to the Central Algerian Commission for Venereal Diseases, they argued:

What can one, in effect, hope of these women who, living for years in prostitution, would be required by law, overnight, to resume an honest life? It would be necessary to admit that we could rapidly reeducate them, reclass them in society, and prevent them from succumbing to every new temptation.<sup>213</sup>

In Algeria unlike in France, Raynaud argued, the social structures necessary for such a program of *relèvement* did not exist—due to conditions of colonial rule. The law, he said, presupposed the existence of avenues for “social prophylaxis” absent in Algeria, because

for reasons of ethnic particularities, in Algeria we hit insurmountable difficulties. Native prostitution there is, in effect, very developed; in the city of Algiers it already represents ¾ of

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<sup>212</sup> “Note pour Monsieur le Directeur du Cabinet de Monsieur l’Ambassadeur de France, Gouverneur Général d’Algérie, Objet : Loi n° 46-685 du 13 avril 1946 tendant à la fermeture des maisons de tolérance et au renforcement de la lutte contre le proxénétisme,” November 5, 1957, GGA 4U 56, ANOM. ... *en raison du nombre insuffisant des laboratoires et centres prophylactiques spécialisés, l’application des dispositions de la loi du 13 Avril 1946 en ce qui concerne la fermeture immédiate des maisons de tolérance paraît prématurée et pourrait présenter des inconvénients en égard de la protection de la Santé Publique.*

<sup>213</sup> Maurice Raynaud, L. Colonieu, and E. Hadida, “La Lutte Antivénérienne En Algérie,” *Algérie Médicale* 50, no. 5 (1947): 399–400. *Que peut-on, en effet, espérer de ces femmes qui vivent depuis des années de la prostitution, seront tenues par la loi, du jour au / lendemain, de reprendre une vie honnête? Il faudrait admettre que nous pourrions rapidement les rééduquer, les reclasser dans la société, et les empêcher de succomber à toute nouvelle tentation.*

the public women; in the interior, the proportion is 95%. It indicates women who possess no instruction, have never learned any job, and whose education proves particularly difficult.<sup>214</sup>

Raynaud's racist argument is a cyclical one. Settler policies structured Algerian women's entrance into the sex market; settler ideologies shaped the collection and analysis of statistics; and settler law neglected the establishment of social welfare institutions present in France. Moreover, settler policy had for more than a century chosen not to address sexually transmitted infections as a public health issue beyond protecting European enclaves. As a result of this legacy, Raynaud could deem Algeria unfit for the abolition of the system of regulations due to "ethnic particularities" produced by the very conditions his proposals guaranteed.

### *Punishment and Cure*

The postwar legal climate did not fundamentally alter the underlying assumptions of the colonial regulators, but administrators' rhetoric shifted to foreground the state's mandate of care over its techniques of control. While Raynaud emphasized Algeria's lack of "readiness" for an unregulated sex market by conjuring images of diseased sexual ghettos produced by the conditions of the settler colony, for the first time, proposed reforms incorporated an interest in the will of sex workers to be tested and treated. If a sex worker aimed to work outside of the incursions of the state, colonial rhetoric about thousands of Algerian *clandestines* bespeaks, at the very least, Algerian women's

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<sup>214</sup> Raynaud, Colonieu, and Hadida, "La Lutte Antivénéérienne En Algérie," 400. ... *en Algérie en raison de particularités ethniques à des difficultés insurmontable. La prostitution indigène y est, en effet extrêmement développée; dans la ville d'Alger elle représente déjà les ¾ des femmes publiques ; dans l'intérieur la proportion est de 95%. Il s'agit de femmes qui ne possèdent aucune instruction, n'ont jamais appris aucun métier et dont l'éducation s'avère particulièrement difficile.*

successful evasion of—and resistance to—the regime. The release requests filed by largely settler *filles soumises*, for their part, testify to their sustained objection to the registration system and, in particular, its enforcement by the *police des mœurs*. While these women were willing, at times, to negotiate with bureaucrats, appeal to military authorities, and cooperate with doctors, their requests compile an extended critique of the police. In light of the heightened authority of the medical establishment, administrators' interest in liberal cosmetics, and women's relentless resistance to the police, colonial doctors and bureaucrats concocted a set of reforms to emphasize "voluntarism" over coercion when it came to sanitary controls. For the first time, they sought to sidestep police compulsion and convince women to attend medical inspections by choice.

Shaped as the proposed reforms were by racialized biomedical knowledge and legal discrimination against women of the urban poor, this renewed *lutte antivénérienne* responded to women's resistance to surveillance and the pressures brought about by the war by proposing emphasis on medical consent. Rather than arrest, register, and compel women into mandatory screenings, Raynaud suggested encouraging unregistered sex workers to attend health inspections voluntarily. "What we must obtain from these prostitutes," he wrote in an internal report, "is that they submit willingly to medical surveillance."<sup>215</sup> The goal of Raynaud's proposed "medico-administrative organization"<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>215</sup> Maurice Raynaud, L. Colonieu, and E. Hadida, "Organisation de La Lutte Antivénérienne," n.d., 5, GGA 4U 54, ANOM. *Nous devons donc modifier cette tactique. Ce qu'il faut obtenir de ces prostituées, c'est qu'elles se soumettent de bon gré à une surveillance médicale.*

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

is not to push *clandestines* to obtain cards — which they consider to a degrading measure and evade at all costs — but, in exploiting this fear, to obtain the generalization of medical control, more or less freely consented to.<sup>217</sup>

Indeed, for Raynaud, this “generalization of medical control” should take place by bending police power to the surveillance needs of the “medico-administrative state.” Free consent (“more or less”) could be obtained, he argued, by furnishing the proposed organization with even more information about the women Raynaud sought to control: the names of sex workers, their home addresses, the addresses of the establishments they frequented, and the addresses of the *maisons de passe* (hotels rented by the hour) across the city. Despite the shift in rhetoric, Raynaud was no less enthusiastic than his predecessors about tightening surveillance of sex workers’ intimate lives.

Raynaud’s proposal betrays the police’s failure to break the women of Algiers into submission to the medical surveillance regime dressed as a social service through the rhetoric of public health. He argued that the data on the sex market, merely transferred by the police into the hands of medical authorities, should be used by “the medical service, with its social assistants [and] sanitary agents” to approach and verbally convince unregistered sex workers “of the necessity of sanitary control.”<sup>218</sup> Raynaud thus reframed the surveillance used to target women for police arrest as social data to be used by doctors to persuade women, on an individual basis, to accede to the importance of regular medical checkups. The social dimension of Raynaud’s shift in tactics is clear: “We must make these women trust us,” he insisted. “They know that they should not fear the doctor, who will not oppose their

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<sup>217</sup> Raynaud, Colonieu, and Hadida, “Organisation de La Lutte Antivénérienne,” 6, GGA 4U 54, ANOM.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

commerce, on the condition that they accept medical control.”<sup>219</sup> To this extent, Raynaud strategically conceded to the women themselves.

Like any strategic concession, however, Raynaud’s proposal refuses to recognize the women’s resistance as a rejection of the system as a whole: of its agents’ putative interest in their welfare, and of the threat of police violence underwriting medical power. In the report, Raynaud rejected the critiques which had, by then, been leveled by abolitionists against the *police des mœurs* in Algiers of “brutality and partiality.” “For several years, we have worked in collaboration with the police force,” Raynaud wrote, “and want to pay homage to the tact they have displayed, and to the precious help that they regularly brought us.”<sup>220</sup> Raynaud clarified: “If today, we want to give a different orientation to this collaboration, it is not due to mistrust or hostility, but simply for reasons of logic and efficiency.”<sup>221</sup>

Indeed, the threat of police violence underwrote Raynaud’s “medico-administrative” reforms:

The police will not, in sum, know about the unregisters sex workers attending medical examination] until the moment that *coercive measures are demanded of them to bring indocile prostitutes to reason*” (emphasis mine).<sup>222</sup>

Given the evidence of women’s hostility to the *police des mœurs*, Raynaud sought to establish doctors as the face of the regulatory matrix. But they remained only its figureheads: In the shadows, the threat of police violence continued to lend teeth to the refashioned regime.

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<sup>219</sup> Raynaud, Colonieu, and Hadida, “Organisation de La Lutte Antivénérienne,” 5, GGA 4U 54, ANOM. *Il faut que nous mettions ces femmes en confiance ; qu’elles sachent qu’elles n’ont rien à redouter du médecin, qui ne s’opposera pas à leur commerce, à la condition qu’elles acceptent le contrôle médical.*

<sup>220</sup> Ibid., 7–8. *Depuis plusieurs années, nous travaillons en collaboration avec les services de police et nous tenons à rendre hommage au tact dont ils ont toujours fait preuve, et à l’aide précieuse qu’ils nous ont régulièrement apportée.*

<sup>221</sup> Ibid., 8. *Si donc nous tenons aujourd’hui à donner à cette collaboration une orientation différente, ce n’est aucunement par méfiance ou par hostilité, mais simplement par logique et souci d’efficacité.*

<sup>222</sup> Ibid. *La police n’aura en somme à les connaître qu’au moment où des mesures coercitives lui seront demandées pour ramener à la raison les prostituées indociles.*



*The Limits of the Voluntary*

In fact, the proposals Raynaud, Colonieu, and Hadida put forth took women's resistance in stride to furnish colonial doctors with a new set of claims to authority over their lives. For one thing, the renewed *lutte antivénérienne* only widened the demographic of women that administrators should target for suspicion. If the release requests reveal the difficulty in identifying women entering the commercial sex market unsupervised—and how frequently the police misidentified and repressed women innocent of such a charge—Raynaud's reforms only deepened existing dynamics of suspicion of the urban working poor. Indeed, the list of women whom public health officials framed as sexually suspect was long. The report divides *clandestines* into three groups:

1. The married woman who frequents the discreet meeting house; the store clerk, the typist, the model, the restaurant or brasserie waitress who goes home or allows herself to be driven to some welcoming hotel.
2. Women who officially engage in prostitution, known to everyone, but whom no one bothers: these are the hostesses of dance halls, bars, low-level artists, certain regulars in low-class hotels.
3. The girls on the sidewalk, professional prostitutes, clients of clandestine establishments where during the day they take the clients they have been able to solicit.<sup>223</sup>

Raynaud lamented that the *police des mœurs* focus all of their attention on rounding up women of the third group, women who solicit on the street.<sup>224</sup> But under the guise of *la lutte antivénérienne*, he encouraged the police to turn their attention to a broad cross-section of the urban working class: store

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<sup>223</sup> Raynaud, Colonieu, and Hadida, "Organisation de La Lutte Antivénérienne," 4, GGA 4U 54, ANOM. *Au premier groupe appartiennent: la femme mariée qui fréquente la discrète maison de rendez-vous; la commise de magasin, la dactyl, le mannequin, la serveuse de restaurant ou de brasserie qui se rendent à domicile ou se laissent conduire dans quelque hôtel accueillant. Le deuxième groupe comprend des femmes qui se livrent officiellement à la prostitution, au su de tout le monde, mais que personne n'inquiète: ce sont les entraîneuses de dancing, de bar, les artistes de bas-étage, certaines habituées de maisons de passe. Quant au troisième groupe, il est constitué par les filles de trottoir, prostituées professionnelles, clientes attirées d'établissements clandestins où elles mènent dans la journée les clients qu'elles ont pu racoler.*

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

clerks, typists, models, waitresses, hostesses, and “low-level” artists. The sexuality of all such women was, from a public hygiene perspective, suspect.

I. PROSTITUEES CARTEES.

ANNÉES	TOTAL	« MAISON »		« ISOLÉES »		INSCRIPTIONS NOUVELLES	RADIATIONS
		E.	I.	E.	I.		
1946 .....	650	60	85	107	398	159	57
1947 .....	580	73	79	73	355	255	59
1948 .....	543	78	74	38	353	172	55
1949 .....	548	82	75	31	360	178	58

Chiffres comparables n'appelant aucun commentaire.

II. PROSTITUEES CLANDESTINES.

ANNÉES	TOTAL	RÉPARTITION		MOINS DE 18 ANS		DE 18 A 21 ANS		PLUS DE 21 ANS	
		E.	I.	E.	I.	E.	I.	E.	I.
1946	393	58	335	7	70	19	101	32	164
1947	381	66	315	11	62	12	90	43	163
1948	387	48	339	8	64	10	79	30	196
1949	304	39	265	2	38	5	59	32	168

Nombre toujours élevé de clandestines dans la proportion de 7 indigènes pour 1 européenne.

Figure 3.1: Dr. Lucien Colonieu, “Report on the Functioning of the Algiers *Centre de Salubrité* During the Year 1949,” *Cahiers Médicaux de l’Union Française: Revue médico-chirurgicale de la France d’outre-mer* 5, no. 38 (1950): 213.

Reports from the Algiers *centre de salubrité* after the reforms unveil a system barely altered in its coercive substructure. Lucien Colonieu’s 1949 report continued to racialize public health statistics, estimating the number of *clandestines* in the proportion of seven *indigènes* for one European.<sup>225</sup> His first report on STI treatment after the war classified the 665 sex workers with registration cards treated in 1946 at the Algiers *centre de salubrité* by citizenship and place of work: 145 women treated worked out of *maisons* (60 European, 85 Algerian), and 505 *isolées* (107, European, 398 Algerian). Of the 393

<sup>225</sup> Colonieu, “Rapport sur le fonctionnement du Centre de Salubrité d’Alger pendant l’année 1949,” 213. *Nombre toujours élevé de clandestines dans la proportion de 7 indigènes pour 1 européenne.*

“*clandestines*” treated, 58 were European (including 7 minors) and 335 were Algerian (including 70 minors).<sup>226</sup> Colonieu’s 1946 statistics, moreover, count ten times more Algerian than European children involved in the sex market.<sup>227</sup> Although they hesitated to keep children on the registers, public health officials nevertheless sought to bring girls identified by the *police des mœurs* under sanitary surveillance: A report from 1929 by the minister of the interior suggested that doctors take special care to inspect “minors under the age of eighteen, whose non-registration need not obstruct the supervision that is all the more necessary, as these young girls are the most dangerous.”<sup>228</sup> Colonieu’s data thus rehearsed the prewar image of a sex market overrun by ungovernable Algerian women. Indeed, the threat of police violence sustained the postwar program: In 1946, Colonieu reported that the *clandestines* had been hospitalized for treatment only after being “presented” at the *centre de salubrité* by the *service des mœurs*.<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>226</sup> Colonieu, “Rapport sur le fonctionnement du Centre de Salubrité pendant l’année 1946,” March 20, 1947, 1, GGA 4U 56, ANOM.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid.

<sup>228</sup> Le Ministre de l’Intérieur et Le Ministre Du Travail, de l’Hygiène, de l’Assistance et de La Prevoyance Sociales à Messieurs Les Préfets, “Instructions générales relatives aux instructions dans lesquelles devra s’exercer la surveillance sanitaire des prostituées,” July 3, 1929, 8, GGA 4U 55, ANOM. *Les mineures de 18 ans dont la non inscription ne saurait faire obstacle à une surveillance d’autant plus nécessaire que ces jeunes filles sont les plus dangereuses.*

<sup>229</sup> Colonieu, “Rapport sur le fonctionnement du Centre de Salubrité pendant l’année 1946,” 2, GGA 4U 56, ANOM.

## Conclusion

Over the regulation system's *longue durée* in colonial Algiers, officials could never accomplish what they claimed the public health law should do. The quest for the clandestine never stopped; increased medical surveillance never solved the problem of STIs; the number of *filles soumises* never substantially increased. In over a century of regulation, what remained constant was the social hygiene program's underlying structure of coercion enacted by the *police des mœurs*. Indeed, these years marked a failed experiment in reform that betrayed to historical memory what the women who were this system's subjects already knew: that the "public" whose health the law protected never included the women detained in state facilities and inspected with state instruments. From the dawn of the regulationist program, there were women who refused to accept the regulator's rhetoric of welfare by evading registration and objecting to the arbitrary violence of the police. In so doing, they denied the conflation of care and control at the heart of colonial power's intimate exercise. If the system that emerged out of the 1940s responded to these concerns, it was only to guarantee a longer life for a system fundamentally at odds with the flag of "free consent" its agents waved.

The historical processes revealed in these pages narrate marginalized groups of women negotiating daily with banal techniques of power clothed in welfare. The author could excavate only fragments of the women that have been this essay's subject, marginalized in historical memory by the very processes that limited their lives. But I have hoped to transform a disciplined paper trail of women's contact with the colonial state into a record of their resistance to police force. The women who reach us through the archive of state-licensed sex work—whether they worked openly as full-time sex workers or had been misidentified by the police—flash across the documents as people with

desires, programs, and experiences of their own. I hope to right some historical wrongs by reading their resistance as an argument: against arbitrary police power, yes, but also in favor of a revolutionary politics. Like the inadequate promises of the French Union, colonial bureaucrats incorporated dissent into their reformist program to shield themselves from more radical change. The system would not fall until the settler-colonial state was destroyed in the Algerian War of Independence. It was never enough to reform a system predicated on colonial and patriarchal power; the structure of social relations had to change.

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